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TALKS WITH TURTLES PRODUCERS
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#79

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL L BOATZ
associate editor

BOB & NANCY GARCIA
PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL
contributing editors

M KAY McGONNELL
operations manager

D HAMBONE
art & tone director

DON MARKSTEIN
typographer

DOUG WRIGHT
production

CAROLYN YOUNG
post production

TAMMY BROWN
CAMILLA CAMPBELL
MIKE CASEY
ALISON EMILIO
CAROL KALISH
LORI KOONIN
PEGGY MAY
ED O'NEAL
CHERYL PRINDLE
special thanks

MARTIN W HERZOG
canadian correspondent

T P BEAST
teenage mutant ninja dog

A G SLAM
teenage mutant ninja horse

J R MATHER
international marketing director

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UP FRONT

Have you ever been called selfish? I'm sure you have — I'd be willing to bet everyone has been called selfish at least once in their lives, probably more. I'd also be willing to bet the term selfish was not used in a complimentary manner. But I will freely admit that I'm a selfish person. I'll also freely admit that you are a selfish person. However, I don't consider selfish to be an insult! In fact, I believe self interest motivates us in virtually everything we do!

Let's take me for example. Why do I write comic books? The obvious answer is I simply like doing so. Another answer could be I enjoy entertaining people. And yet a third answer could be that I want to make money. So, which of these three answers is the correct one? All of them, of which only the third answer sounds even remotely selfish to you, right? But let's look more closely at the first two answers . . .

How can entertainment for other people be seen as selfish? Simple — *I enjoy doing it!* If I didn't like to entertain people, if it didn't make me feel good, I wouldn't do it. The same argument can be applied to the other "selfless" answer. If I like to write comic books then I gain satisfaction from writing them. I also gain satisfaction from sharing my stories with others. Not once, notice, did I ever mention anyone else in any of those three answers. The enjoyment I derive from writing comic books is totally based upon how *I* feel, not how you feel. Of course, I like it when you readers enjoy my stories. It makes me feel good. The fact that my story also made you feel good is a beneficial side effect — but it's still just that. If everyone in the world hated my stories I could still derive enjoyment from creating them. And since a selfish person only does things that make him feel better, I must be considered selfish.

But how, you may be asking, could that apply to, say, someone who freely contributes time and/or money to worthy causes? They are driven only by their desire to help those less fortunate than themselves, you might say. They could never be considered selfish, right? Wrong. Let's look a bit more closely at the motivation of these philanthropists . . .

Out of the goodness of their hearts, they give to those who have less. Why do they do that? *Because it makes them feel good,* that's why! To them, the enjoyment they gain by helping others results in a balanced exchange. They give money (or time) and receive the warm glow they derive from helping others. If they didn't receive these good feelings, then they wouldn't contribute to the needy. Though they appear to be selfless, they are in truth no less selfish than I.

Selfishness — it's the driving force behind goodness everywhere.

— Henry Vogel

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL: **UP FRONT**
guest editorial by *henry vogel*
3

WRITER: **BOBBY HERBECK**
the tale of the first turtles screenplay, as told to *pat o'neill*
4

WRITER: **TODD LANGEN**
the tale of the final turtles screenplay, as told to *pat o'neill*
12

WRITER/ARTIST:
BATTON LASH
wolff & byrd artist lays down the law to bob and nancy garcia
18

ACTRESS: **JUDITH HOAG**
pat o'neill interviews the live-action april
30

DIRECTOR: **STEVE BARRON**
a chat with the chief high guy
48

PRODUCER: **SIMON FIELDS**
a pithy palaver with a producer
56

PRODUCER: **TOM GRAY**
insights of an executive producer
60

LICENSOR: **MARK FREEDMAN**
the force behind the phenomenon
67

LETTERS: **THE LAST WORD**
you have spoken
75

"I found out about The Turtles, actually —

BOBBY HERBECK

*Bobby Herbeck's qualifications for writing the screenplay for TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES are particularly appropriate, for he has been a stand-up comedian, an actor, and a writer of situation comedies. And for those of you who may be thinking, "But what about the action and adventure and drama!" — has also dipped into those fields with appearances on M*A*S*H and in the feature film TORA TORA TORA. This is his first written film — not his first screenplay, rather his first screenplay to be filmed — so he is understandably excited. But his excitement over TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES has been at an elevated level from the first day of his involvement in the project. So, let's visit with the man who had the assignment of taking the creations of Eastman and Laird, developing the concepts for the silver screen, all the while walking a tightrope of needing Eastman and Laird's approval while also having to satisfy the requirements of the film-makers . . .*

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like most adults — through a friend of mine."

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *I'm speaking with Bobby Herbeck, who wrote the script for the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES movie —*
BOBBY HERBECK: By the way, I saw a two-hour rough cut of it and I must say the picture looks great! I'm really excited about it. I certainly . . . I don't think I really had any *doubts,* but I wondered if it would look somewhat realistic, and it looks *great!*
PAT: *How did you first find out about the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*
BOBBY: I found out about it, actually — like *most* adults, who don't know anything about TMNT — I found out about it through a friend of mine, **Kim Dawson,** who directed and produced **Gallagher's** stuff for Showtime, his specials. **Gallagher's** manager, **Gary Propper,** had really come across TMNT a couple of years ago. They ran it by **Kim Dawson,** thinking they should try to buy the rights to this for a picture and so on, which they *couldn't* get done for reasons unknown. Evidently **Mark Freedman,** who handles all of that for **Eastman** and **Laird** . . . I think Mark was wanting someone who made pictures to

"They were happy with what I'd come up with,

come to him.

Anyway, Kim ran it by me. We had worked together on Ron's — I'm blanking on Ron's last name, a great ventriloquist — Disney special. At that point, Kim told me about NINJA TURTLES and he gave me some of the comic books. I had just written a picture for Golden Harvest called DEPARTMENT STORE — which they're going to shoot next year — and I said, "Gee, this is right up Golden Harvest's alley. They're looking for stuff." **Tom Gray,** who's pretty much in charge of production, wants to get a rep group of writers and so on and so forth together, and try to Americanize Golden Harvest. And this is kind of a bridge, you know. It has the martial arts, which has been their background, and yet we'd be dealing with something that's very American.

Then it took me *forever* to get **Tom Gray** to have a lunch with **Kim Dawson,** because he had nine things on his mind. My favorite part of the whole story is that we went to lunch with **Tom Gray,** we sat down, we had the color graphic comic books — the big comic books in color which are *beautifully* done — but Kim kept saying, "Yeah, you get four major stars and you put them in the Turtle costumes." Well, right away, **Tom Gray** is seeing $10 million to get four major stars into costumes, and I'm kicking Kim under the table and saying, "You *don't* need major stars, you can loop the voices." So, we talked, we had a nice lunch, and **Tom Gray** had not even picked the books up yet. He said, "I'll tell you guys, I've got Bobby's picture to do, I've got another picture, I've got all this other stuff — I really don't see us doing this picture." It was *over!*

Photo: Alan Markfield

"And no anchovies . . . please!" orders Donatello! Pizza is the Turtles' favorite food.

He literally was sliding out of the booth — I always say we were saved by a cheek on this deal — and as he was saying good-bye he started thumbing through the color graphic book, and he all of a sudden got locked into it. And he said, "Wait a minute, we can do this." He moved back in the booth and we spent another 90 minutes there. And Tom says, "We don't need to put major stars into these costumes, we need guys that can do martial arts and we need the best there is to make the costumes."

This was a year ago July, and the next thing I knew the deal was made and I went to Massachusetts where **Kevin Eastman** and **Peter Laird** live. I was there October through January, off and on, working on a story — because we needed to get them to sign off on the picture and before they would do that they wanted a story that they approved of. Well, you're dealing with two guys, two *distinct* different personalities — one's real outgoing, one's real quiet — and I'd go home every day, back to my hotel room, and they were happy with what I'd come up with, and the next morning we'd get together and they weren't happy. It took four months to get them to accept a story.

Then from there they hired **Steve**

Pizza — the breakfast of champions . . . COWABUNGA!

Photo: Alan Markfield

and the next morning they weren't happy."

Barron, the director, and I went to England with him, and started on the script, wrote the script. And I don't know what else I can tell you. They started shooting the picture almost a year to the date, and it's happening! And this is my first feature being made! I wrote for DIFF'RENT STROKES and JEFFERSONS and SMALL WONDER – as well. I did the warm-up for those shows, and was in many episodes of DIFF'RENT STROKES as an actor. I did every way I could to make a dime out of Embassy. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *You want to hear something amusing, to talk about coincidences?*

BOBBY: What?

PAT: *I'm doing this on a freelance basis, but I also have a nine-to-five job working for Act Three Publications, which is a subsidiary of Norman Lear's* current *company, Act Three Communications, which he started after he sold off Embassy.*

BOBBY: Yes? Well, I started doing warm-ups for them — geez, this was twelve years ago — just by accident. I was doing stand-up on the road, and I was opening for **Feliciano,** was home for a week, and their warm-up guy on DIFF'RENT STROKES . . . I kind of started a trend in that they really didn't go out and hire comedians to do warm-ups, they basically hired staff writers. I had auditioned for FERNWOOD TONIGHT and they were in a panic, called the gal on FERNWOOD TONIGHT — I'm blanking on her name now, but she became a big producer for the company — and they said they needed someone to do a warm-up. I hadn't seen her for six months, right, and for some reason I sprang to her mind. She called my agent, "Would Bobby do a warm-up?" He calls me, "Would you do a warm-up?" And I said, "Sure, fine, sure!" I didn't know what the hell a warm-up was. *(Laughter.)*

I just went out and sold energy, then I went back out and finished up with **Feliciano.** Then I ended up doing warm-ups, did them for ten years for a *ton* of **Norman Lear** shows. And I saw an opportunity to act. I would always give the producers ideas, once I got seeded in there — I'd throw a joke at them, for the show. And the next thing you know they gave me scripts to polish, and from that I started pitching stories, and I started writing. If somebody would have told me ten years ago, even *five* years ago, that I could lock myself in a room and write, I would have said, "Well, carry him away." *(Laughter.)* I enjoy it, but it's taken me away from performing which is killing me, because that seems to be part and parcel to my working, you know. So I'm going back to some stand-up just for sanity. But yeah, I did DIFF'RENT STROKES and JEFFERSONS and, God, HELLO, LARRY if anybody remembers! *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *MacLean Stevenson.*

BOBBY: Yes. It was on just a couple of years and then they got it syndicated. I don't know if you know, but **Norman Lear's** company, one of their *greatest* assets, they had the capability to syndicate *anything. Anything!* I don't care if it was people going into a bathroom, they would syndicate it, find a market for it. HELLO, LARRY for awhile came on in syndication at midnight, and I said, "My God, they found the time slot for the show!" *(Laughter.)* But just doing a bunch of shows I got into writing for TV, and certainly doing stand-up for years. And I helped start a group called the Groundlings which is quite well known out here, which evolved out of the Comedy Store.

PAT: *Let's go on to some specifics about the movie.*

BOBBY: Sure.

PAT: *As you were writing it, realizing that the four lead characters were going to either be in heavy costume or were*

Michaelangelo visits the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see his namesake's work.

Photo: Timothy White

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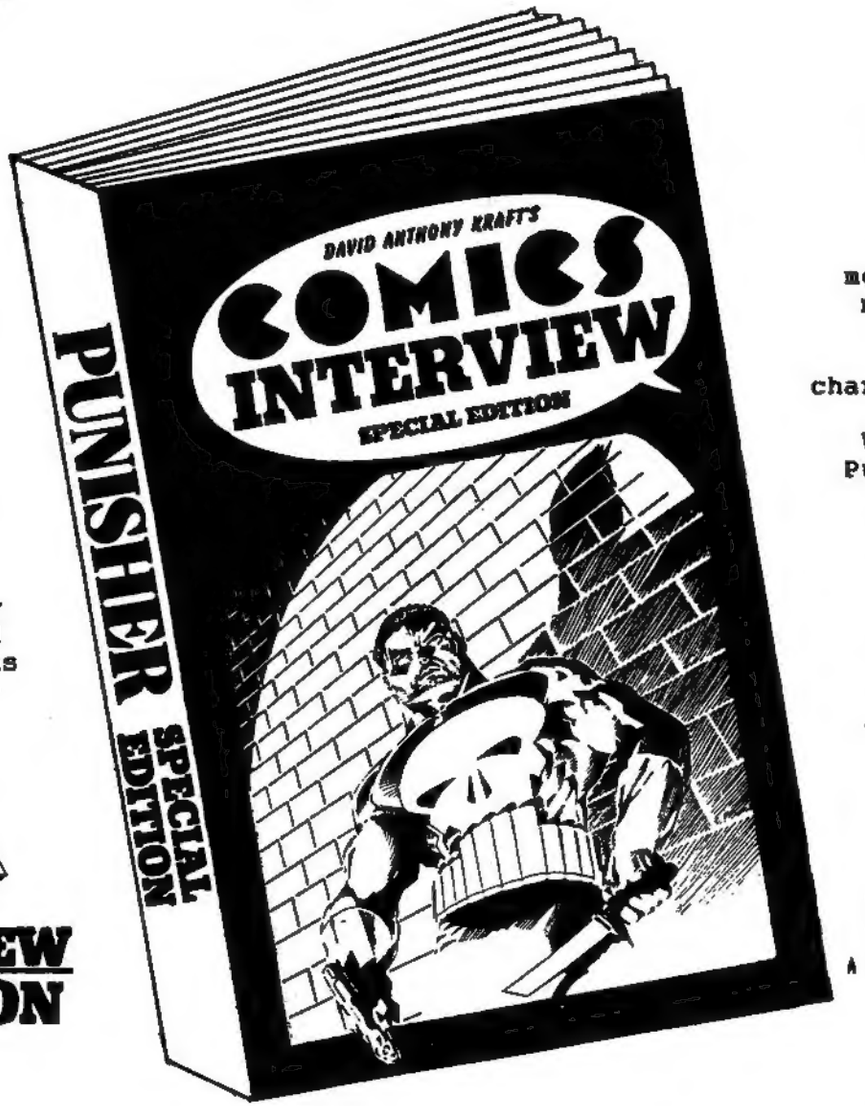

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"I think we need to give each Turtle a separate personality."

going to be somehow mechanical, that somehow or other these four lead characters were not going to be people *in the usual sense of the word, did that make a difference to you in terms —*

BOBBY: No. I was interviewed last week and they asked that exact question, and it's interesting but I never for once let that get in the way of any action stuff that I wrote or anything. I know as well as you do that they can do *anything* today. I just knew that they would find a way to do it. I must admit — I mean, I'd like to have some brilliant answer for this — maybe it was *dumbness* on my part, but I never worried about that.

My biggest concern, if you're interested, the toughest part . . . this thing was a real bitch for me because having written stand-up and sketch and variety and sit-com, this was a whole new animal for me. This is a comedy action/adventure thing. I got very much into **Joseph Campbell** through this. His mythology series with **Bill Moyers** happened to be on at that same time I was writing, and I became a student and got his books, because I was trying — and I have a tendency to over intellectualize — but I was trying to understand the mythology of these Turtles.

The *toughest* part of writing TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES for me was . . . first of all, the kids know the Turtles so we've got a built-in audience there. But the reality is, as **Tom Gray** says (I don't think this way, but he does) we need adults to see this movie because they pay the full price. *(Laughter.)* It sounds cold to me, but that's show business, you know. I would never think of that. And, if anything, I hope we have a film that the adults . . . I will be real surprised if it doesn't become real camp with the college kids, but I'm hoping that — what am I trying to say . . . One of the toughest things was trying to write something that would appeal from children on up to adults.

My feeling is that kids are real sharp today, if you're writing for kids and it comes out corny then the kids are going to say it's corny. And the most wonderful thing about TMNT is — especially when you see the film — they're very believable. It's like, "Jesus, this could really be." They are *very* lifelike. And, like, one of the great things about E.T. was you got past what he *looked* like, you know, and got into feeling — you really *cared* about that ugly thing! And the Turtles are the same way. It's so real, it's very human. Humanizing the Turtles I guess is what I'm trying to say.

PAT: *In terms of humanizing them, did you find that in writing them you had to hear a separate voice for each of them?*

BOBBY: Absolutely. Very good question. The first thing I did was — well, they're on TV, you know.

PAT: *Yeah.*

BOBBY: The first thing I did — don't ask me why, it was an impulse — is I turned them on and I turned my back to the cartoon and I listened to it. I did not look at the cartoon, I listened. The one thing I found — this is very interesting, and I worked real hard at this in the long run — was I found that there were only two distinct voices in the cartoon. One of the Turtles is very *hip* — "Cowabunga! Hey, dude!" — very now, very Valley. The other three sound exactly *alike* to me. So right away in one of my story meetings I

The packaging artwork for the video THE EPIC BEGINS.

"The really great one is Splinter, the rat."

said, "I think we need to give each Turtle a separate personality." Definitely. It's not even the *voice* as much as everything. You could be a blind man and listen to the movie and pick out Donatello and Raphael and Leonardo and Michaelangelo — I hope we captured that.

That, to me, was the most important thing, because they *look* alike. On the cartoons, in the comic books, in all of the toys, they have their initials on their belts and they all wear a different color bandana. Now, for some reason Peter and Kevin did not want that in the movie, they didn't want the initials on the belts — I never understood that — so we didn't do it. Therefore, you really have got an assignment to give them personalities. And in choosing personalities I dug deep. You'll see, the Turtles each have their moments of being down, their moments of being pissed off, their moments of being hurt, their moments of crying.

The *great* one is Splinter, the rat. I'm getting chills telling you this — you absolutely fall in love with Splinter, their leader, their mentor, their godfather. You get *past* what he looks like, you want to reach up and grab him. He's **Pat Morita** in THE KARATE KID. He's "See how quickly you can take the pebbles from my hand, grasshopper." *(Laughter.)* And that really was my feeling for him at the beginning, he's the wise sage. There's a wonderful battle where he — he's old and bent over and all this — but everything he's taught these four Turtles he pulls within himself and he becomes this powerful force to face the villain who killed *his* master years before. And that's **Joseph Campbell** kind of mythological stuff.

So that's the answer to that, if it makes any sense. Yes, there are different voices, I did find different personalities, and every inch of the way it was a battle because Peter and Kevin had to agree. It was interesting with them because it's like that's their four children, and we really had some tug-of-war. It would be frightening. You'd find yourself in a two-hour conversation and think, "Holy shit, I'm talking about turtles!" *(Laughter.)* But it's like we're talking about their children, you know. "Well, I don't think Michaelangelo would be really grumpy in the morning because when *I'm* with him —" and I'm sitting there thinking, "When you're *with* him!?" *(Laughter.)* And two months later *I'm* talking like that! I mean, I'm *dreaming* about these things!

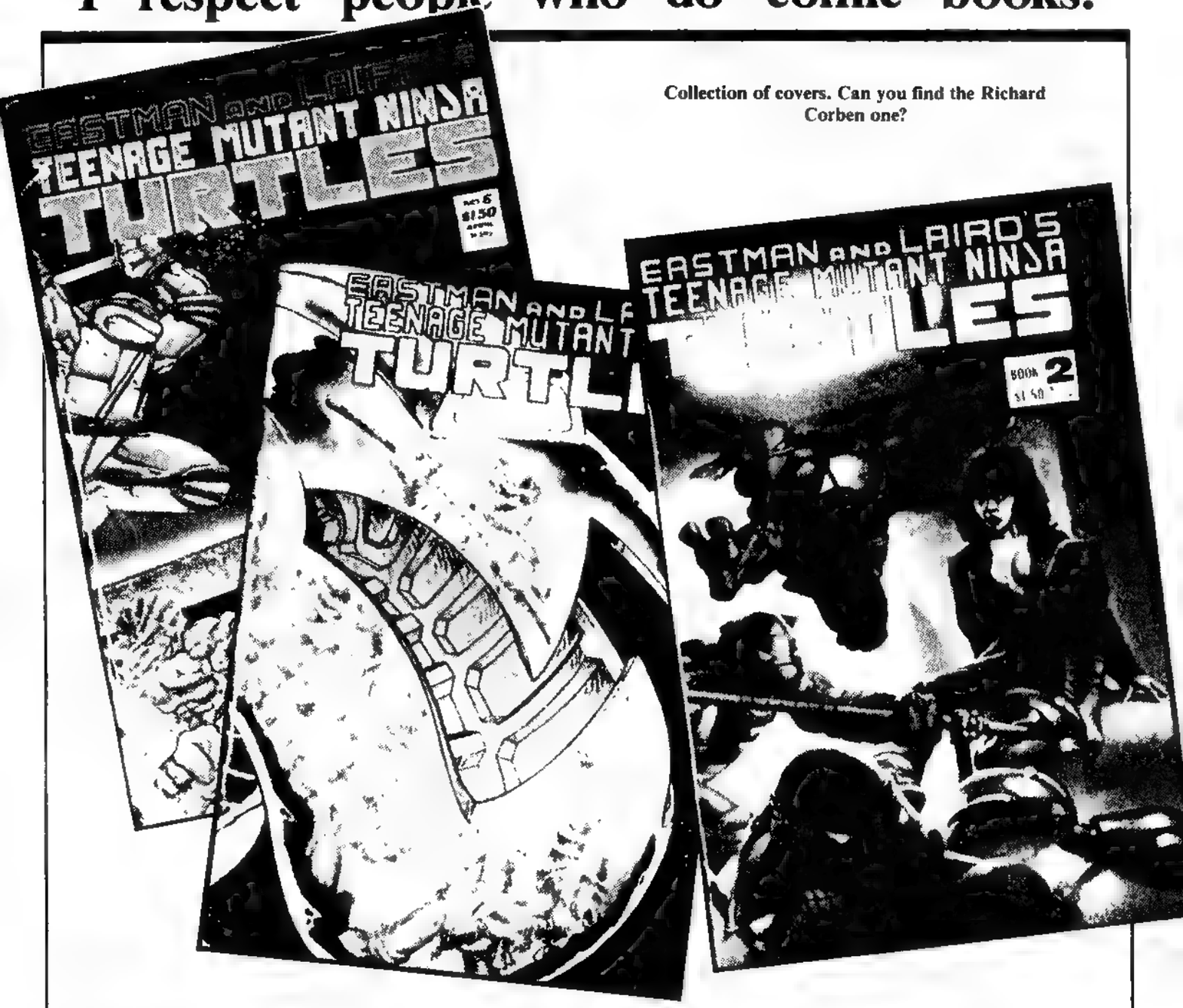
PAT: *I know that there is another writer credited —*

BOBBY: Todd Langen.

PAT: *Can you say anything regarding what you think he did to your work?*

BOBBY: Oh, I think — yeah — I think he did a *terrific* job. I worked very hard on the story, and the story is still there. I

"I respect people who do comic books."



Collection of covers. Can you find the Richard Corben one?

wrote the first draft and Todd wrote the second draft, and I think that — like **Tom Gray** said — I basically did the blueprint. They saw what would and wouldn't work. I put in, you know, the typical "I don't think this will work but here it is anyway," and then once everything was there they saw it. So I think Todd did a terrific job, I have no problem with that at all. My stuff's there; he's certainly made it better. And I think by *committee* it was made better. And when it got into shooting, of course, it got made even better. But it's there! What I spent four months on is *there*, no doubt about it. I can't say enough.

I've never met Todd — this is a strange business. You're collaborating but you're *not* collaborating. And Todd and I both didn't have a lot of time to write this picture, we were under the gun on this, but it came out. He did a hell of a job And I did create two characters for this picture, and they've stayed in and I'm very proud of that. Both are on the bad side. And the rumor is we're going to do more of these, so I think the characters that I gave birth to are going to be around, and I'm delighted.

And I don't know if they told you about **Obata,** who plays one of the characters. **Obata** has his own *dojo* here in L.A., and he was the technical advisor. Well, you aren't going to believe what these Turtles do.

PAT: *Did you see any of the shooting?*

BOBBY: No, I didn't get to go because I had major back surgery — and it was probably for the better. *(Laughter.)* Because I would have been a wreck. Unfortunately, I had my back operated on right after they started, even still I am recuperating, so I didn't get to see any of the shooting. All I saw were some rushes and stuff, so I couldn't tell you anything on that end.

And I must say that when I was with Peter and Kevin — since this is a comic-book magazine — one thing I got out of this whole project was a *great* respect for the people who do comic books. I think we take them for granted. But when you go and see their operation, how much *labor* goes into not just the drawing but in the story, how much *thought* goes into it — you know, Peter and Kevin took it upon themselves to get together some of the best comic-book guys, creators, in the United States. While I was there they had a week's seminar — they're trying to put themselves together as a force, as a group, almost like a union. And, geez, that week I talked to some of the most fascinating creative people I will ever meet.

"I read just about every kind of comic book there was."

TODD LANGEN

Fans of THE WONDER YEARS may recognize his name, and rightly so, for Todd Langen wrote an Emmy-nominated episode for that show's '88-'89 season. However, there's more to him than wistful memories of growing up in the late '60s and early '70s, much much more. But we'll let you discover for yourself why the second screenwriter on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES is suitably not so down to earth . . .

Photo: Alan Markfield

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *You were, I guess, the "polish up" screenwriter?*

TODD LANGEN: Yeah, more or less. It was a rewrite.

PAT: *What kind of things were you asked to change?*

TODD: Well, the movie is basically the story of the Turtles' first encounter with the Shredder and the Foot. The thing that I was asked to help with when I was hired to rework the screenplay was, first of all, the *structure* of the story. It turns out that a *lot* of what was happening in the first third of the movie, the first act, was . . . there was *too* much being explained up front. There were a couple of different flashback sequences and much of the story was being told in the first third of the movie, it didn't leave enough for the *last* two thirds of the movie. So, one thing was to restructure the story so that not *all* of the exposition and *all* of the plot points came out quite so early.

Another thing that we did was we wanted to give the Turtles more character delineation. Their characters were sort of similar to each other in the way that they spoke and in their actions and stuff like that in the first draft, so one of the things that I was supposed to do was give the Turtles a little bit more individual, distinct personalities. And I think we did a pretty good job with that. Also, just to change the story a little bit to facilitate some other things, and having plot points occur at different places, and getting Splinter out of the picture for *more* of the picture than he had been involved with in the first draft.

So it was basically just a restructuring and reworking of the Turtle characters, and just playing around with the dialogue and the general action. It was a fairly extensive rewrite by rewriting

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"I actually liked the Archie comic books."

standards. **Bobby Herbeck,** the original writer, did a good job with his initial research and putting the story together and stuff like that. But it needed some reworking.

PAT: *As a writer is there anything specific about this kind of a project, I mean in terms of being something based on comics or on cartoons, that presents particular challenges?*

TODD: Well, for me, initially, when I first got the call about this, I thought that we were talking about an animation feature. It turns out, of course, that it's going to be live action. There was a certain appeal to working from something that was established like this, and something that *I* found interesting personally.

I don't really think it's more difficult — each project has its own difficulties associated with it. In a way it's *easier,* in that you have a set of characters that are fairly well established to work with, you're not just starting from *scratch* as far as that's concerned. Even the plotline, with the Shredder and the Foot and stuff like that, these things have been established at some point.

On the other hand, the flip side of the coin is that it's sometimes difficult to work with characters that are set, because you're not quite as free to do things as you might be if they were original charcters. But I think working from the comic books was actually an interesting experience, and beneficial as far as the movie is concerned.

PAT: *Have you ever had any interest in comics yourself?*

TODD: I've read a lot of comic books. I haven't been involved so much with the more recent comics, the *darker* sort of comics. When I was a kid growing up I read just about every kind of comic book there was, we had a huge box of them at our house that just kept getting read and reread. Everything, the Marvel comics, the DC comics, all the super-heroes, a lot of the Archie comics — I guess I shouldn't admit that. *(Laughter.)* I actually liked the Archie comic books.

PAT: *There's a place for Archie comics. There's a certain simplicity to them. You have to learn how to read comic books on a certain level, you have to understand how to follow through the story, what order the balloons get read in and things like that.*

TODD: Well, I had a crush on Betty and Veronica for quite a while. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, they were big at our house. I think we covered just about the whole spectrum of the popular comic books at the

"I got that job, the episode aired, the series was canceled."

time, even the little — what are they, the RICHIE RICH group —

PAT: *Harvey.*

TODD: Harvey, right. We had those too, so just about the whole spectrum.

PAT: *Now, the TURTLES movie is in part connected with the whole run of the film world's interest, suddenly, in comic-book and comic-strip and pulp-oriented characters that I guess started with STAR WARS and then just skyrocketed with the immense success of BATMAN.*

TODD: It's interesting how it works, though. I mean, TURTLES was on the drawing boards *long* before BATMAN was the phenomenon that it was. Sometimes it's weird the way it happens in Hollywood, people must think there's some sort of conspiracy or something *(Laughter.)* Do you remember a year or two ago there were, like, three movies that came out at *exactly* the same time, by different studios, that had to do with teenagers changing bodies with their parents.

PAT: *Yeah, that's right.*

TODD: I'm sure they didn't plan that. *(Laughter.)* It just seems to happen that way sometimes.

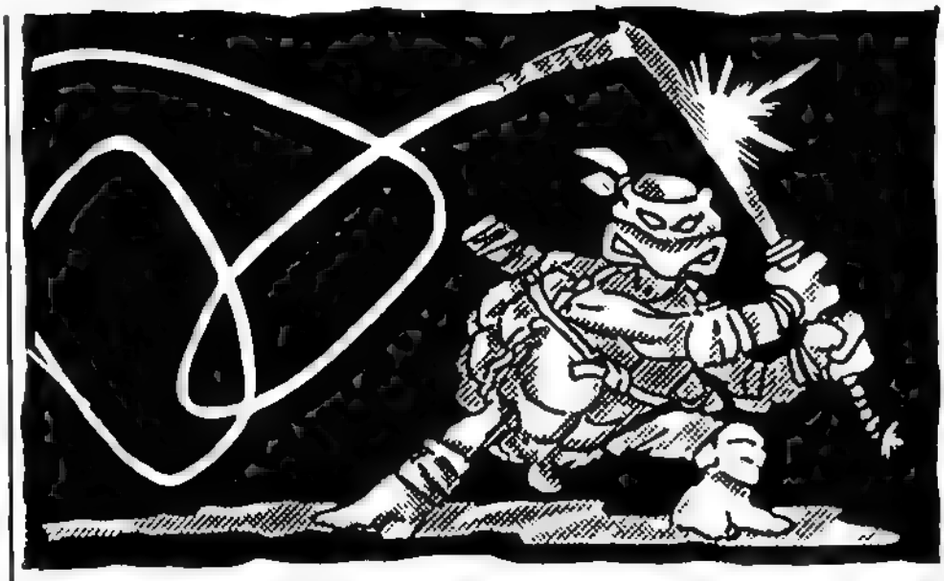
It doesn't really *bother* me, it doesn't *worry* me so much, as to whether it's going to crimp the success of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES or not. It's just like in that case, BIG was the big movie that came out of that. The movies that are good, the movies that are entertaining, are going to rise above the others, and they will be the successful ones. So, as long as you're good it doesn't *matter* if there's a SPIDER-MAN or a SUPERMAN movie coming out. The good ones will rise to the top.

PAT: *Tell me a little bit about your own background.*

TODD: Let's see, where should we start? *(Laughter.)* You want the two-minute bio?

PAT: *Give me the two- to five-minute bio.*

TODD: Okay. I was born in Detroit on January 15, 1960, and had a very nice childhood, thank you. We moved out to the suburbs when I was 11, spent the rest of my time there. Then I went to school at the University of Michigan, I was there from '78 to '82, and studied — get ready for this now — I studied aerospace engineering. Actually, I got two degrees in aerospace engineering, a bachelor's and a master's. Then I came out to work in Los Angeles, California — because that's where *most* of the aerospace business was located.



I worked for three years for Hughes Aircraft Company, in their launch vehicle integration group — which meant that I got to work a lot with NASA. My job was basically integrating our payloads, which mostly were geo-synchronous communications satellites, on the space shuttle. So, I got to do a lot of interesting aerospace sort of stuff, got to travel to the Cape a lot to be involved with integration testing with the shuttle, and also did a lot of travel to meetings and stuff like that in Houston at the Johnson Space Center for mission preparation. I was also there at Mission Control during missions, and got to brief the astronauts and things like that.

There were a lot of interesting things associated with the job, but it wasn't something that I wanted to do in the long term. I made that determination very soon after coming out here and actually started to work in the business. I just looked down the road and asked myself, "Is this something that you want to do for the next 50 years?" And a little bit to my surprise, the answer was no. *(Laughter.)* I had gone through all this education and stuff. Really, this is one of the things if I were to go to a high school to speak to students, I would probably tell them to think a little bit more about what they really want to do. In college you're so focussed on the classes and the grades, and here's a midterm and here's a test, that it's a little bit shortsighted, it isn't really looking down the road far enough. When I finally did get out into the industry and realized that I had the next 50 years to determine my own destiny, it wasn't *exactly* what I wanted to do.

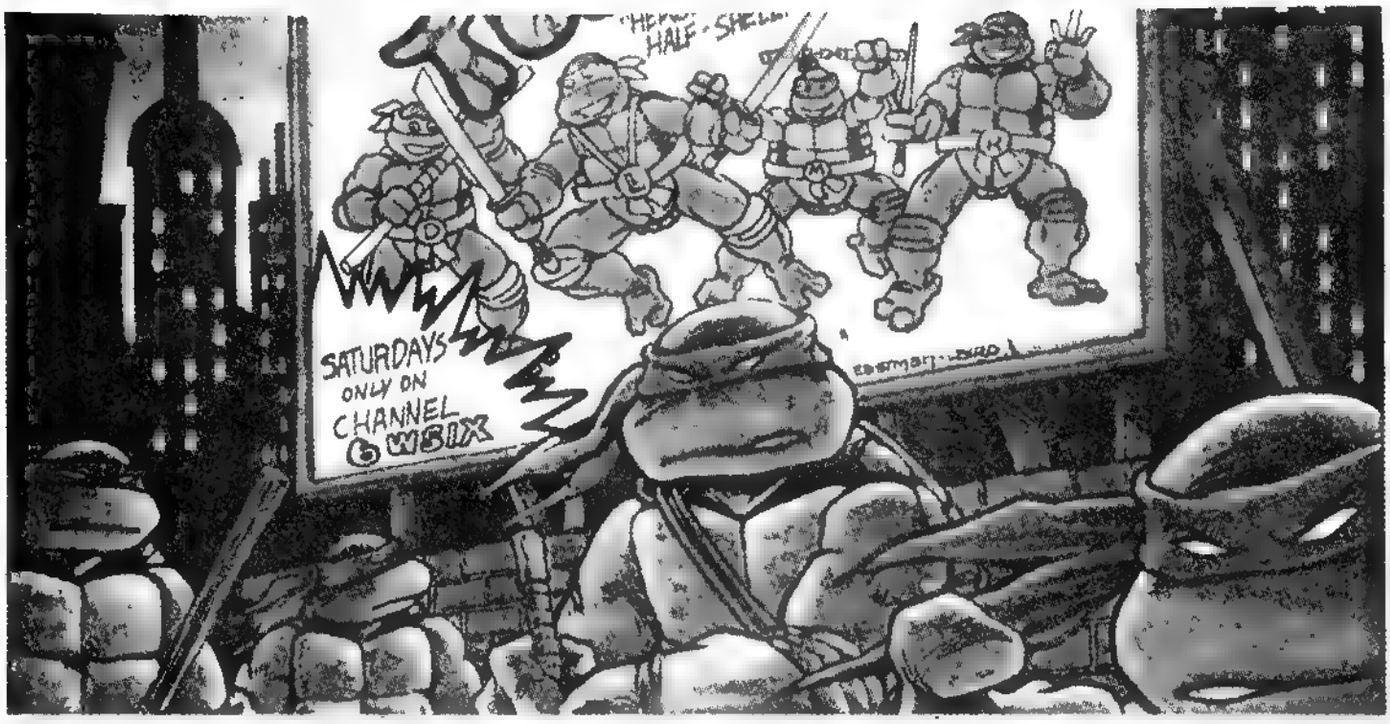
So I began writing. It was probably less than half a year after I came out to California, after graduation, that I started writing. I just started writing "on spec," which means on speculation, not under contract or anything like that. You're just on your own, basically, trying to get people interested in your work. I wrote a screenplay, and I started writing hour-long television shows, and then I started writing comedy. Comedy is really where most of my interest lies, and that's what I've done the most of at this point.

And finally, after two or three years of just writing scripts and practicing and getting the experience and stuff like that, and having a *few* people read my scripts — it's very difficult to get people to read your scripts when you're not represented by an agent — I finally just made the move to full-time writing. I left my job at Hughes at the beginning of 1986, acquired a literary agent soon after that, and it took about a year and a half before I actually got my very first television assignment, which was for a show called THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. Very short-lived *(Laughter.)* A situation comedy on ABC. But it was good experience

Basically, at that point in my career I would have written *anything* to get my Writers Guild card. To get into the guild I would have written for the NEW MUNSTERS if they had asked me. *(Laughter.)* But it was also a good experience because the person who was the executive producer of that show, **Michael J. Weithorn,** had been the supervising producer of FAMILY TIES for like five years, and he was very well respected in the business. He liked my work and he gave me my first job, which was nice. It was a good learning experience. I got that job, the episode aired, the series was cancelled, but I'd joined the Writers Guild, and about two months later the strike hits *(Laughter.)*

I'd been in the guild less than two months, I think, when the strike hit in

"The executive producers *always* have the final rewrite."



March of '88. But actually the strike turned out to be a good thing for me — I was probably one of the few people that actually enjoyed picketing. I was *meeting* people, meeting all these guys who'd done all these TV shows and movies that I had been watching ever since I was a little kid — getting to see people, getting to meet people, getting to talk to people. One of the guys I met on the picket line was **Bruce Rubin,** a screenwriter you'll probably be hearing a lot more of in the near future. He's got two very big projects that are both currently in production. Bruce was very nice to me and he read a spec screenplay that I had written before, and he was working over at Paramount, and *he* showed it to the person who was the vice president in charge of film production at Paramount, **Lindsey Doran.**

And what happened was that the TURTLES people, after getting **Bobby Herbeck's** draft in, the first draft, were sort of out looking for people who might be able to take over the script at that point. And the development people at Limelight Productions, which was the actual creative entity that is producing the picture — Golden Harvest Films, of course, is putting up the money; Limelight supplied the producer and the director and the development people — they put out feelers asking who might be good for this type of a project. Someone approached **Lindsey Doran** with this question and she sort of remembered this spec screenplay that I had written, and she pulled it off the shelf and she gave it to them. And that's how I got my first meeting with the TURTLES people at Limelight, and that led to me being signed up. Oh, and I should mention that I'm working for THE WONDER YEARS.

PAT: *Oh! Terrific!*

TODD: In fact, I've been working as a staff writer since the beginning of the season in June, and I just got a "promotion" to story editor a couple of weeks ago.

PAT: *Neat. How is it to be working on something like that where on a certain level you're constantly having to go back and remember what it was like to be 12 years old at a particular time?*

TODD: I really like that about the show. The character is actually 13 now, we're keeping a 20-year interval. But I *like* that because it's *fun* to go back and think of your own experiences and see how they might work into the show.

I wrote two episodes as a free-lancer last season; in fact I got nominated for an Emmy for one of them, which was a *big* thrill for me, sort of like a dream come true. But, for instance, I used to play trumpet, I was in a lot of bands when I was in school, and I pitched a story where the lead character, Kevin, sort of doesn't do well in this trumpet recital thing — they used to be called solo and ensemble competitions where I came from. This sort of transmuted eventually into a story about Kevin taking piano lessons and screwing up at a piano recital. It was my first WONDER YEARS episode, and it was a neat experience.

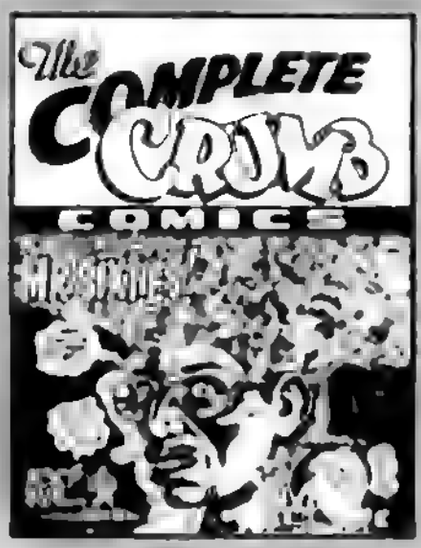
It is *different,* though. It's different than writing something like a screenplay, because you're involved in a staff situation. You usually write the first draft of something and then you might get to write the first revision after the executive producers give you notes and stuff like that, but the executive producers *always* have the final rewrite, and they tweak it around and move it around to *their* satisfaction. So it's more of a collaborative process than movie writing would be.

PAT: *Well, did you by any chance get to see anything on the set while they were shooting TURTLES?*

TODD: I was down in North Carolina for a week in preproduction, because I was doing a little bit of rewriting, and I got to see a few of the sets and some of the Turtle heads and stuff like that. I met **Brian Henson,** who supervised all of the puppeteering aspects of the show. It was fascinating to see these sets come to life, and just see the whole mechanism, the machinery, that it takes to make a movie — it's incredible, it's *massive.* It takes many more people than you'd think it would. All those 6,000 names you see when the end credits roll, you know, they actually do things.

I was invited by the director to stay down in North Carolina for about four weeks so that I could be there during the rehearsal period and the first part of actual shooting. But I had to get back to Los Angeles to start my job with THE WONDER YEARS so, unfortunately, I couldn't partake of that offer. And I've seen a rough cut of the movie, things are moving apace.

ARE UNDERGROUND!



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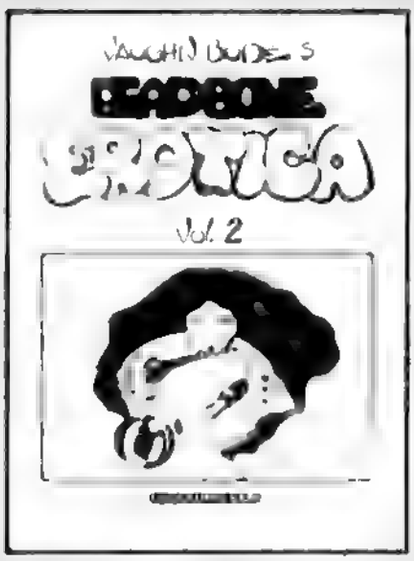

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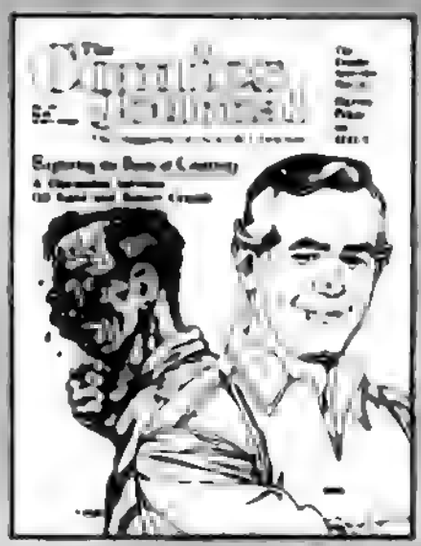

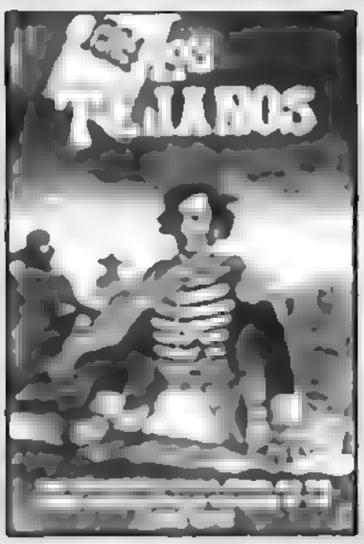

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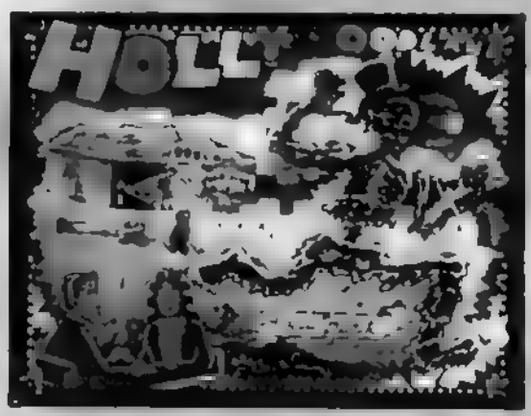

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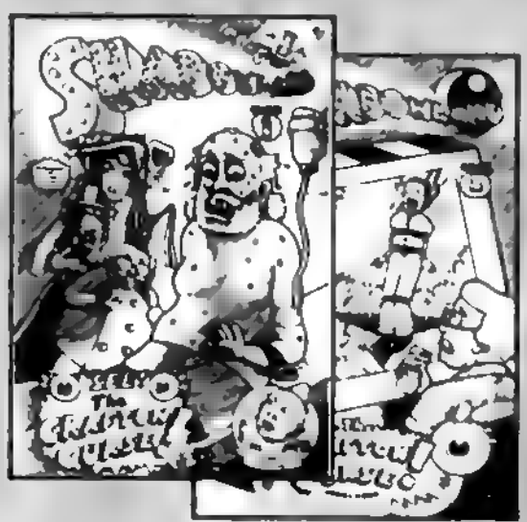

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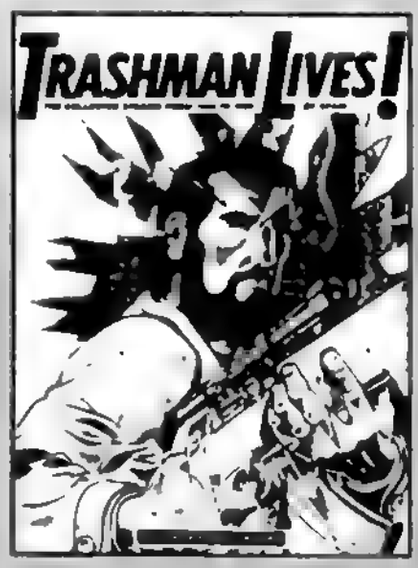

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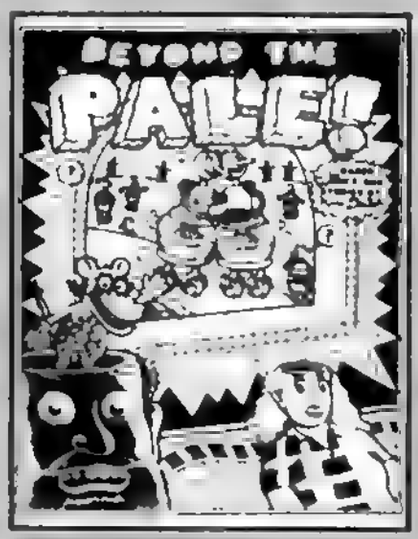

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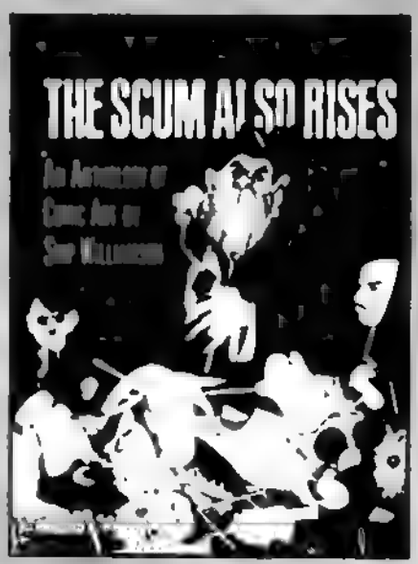

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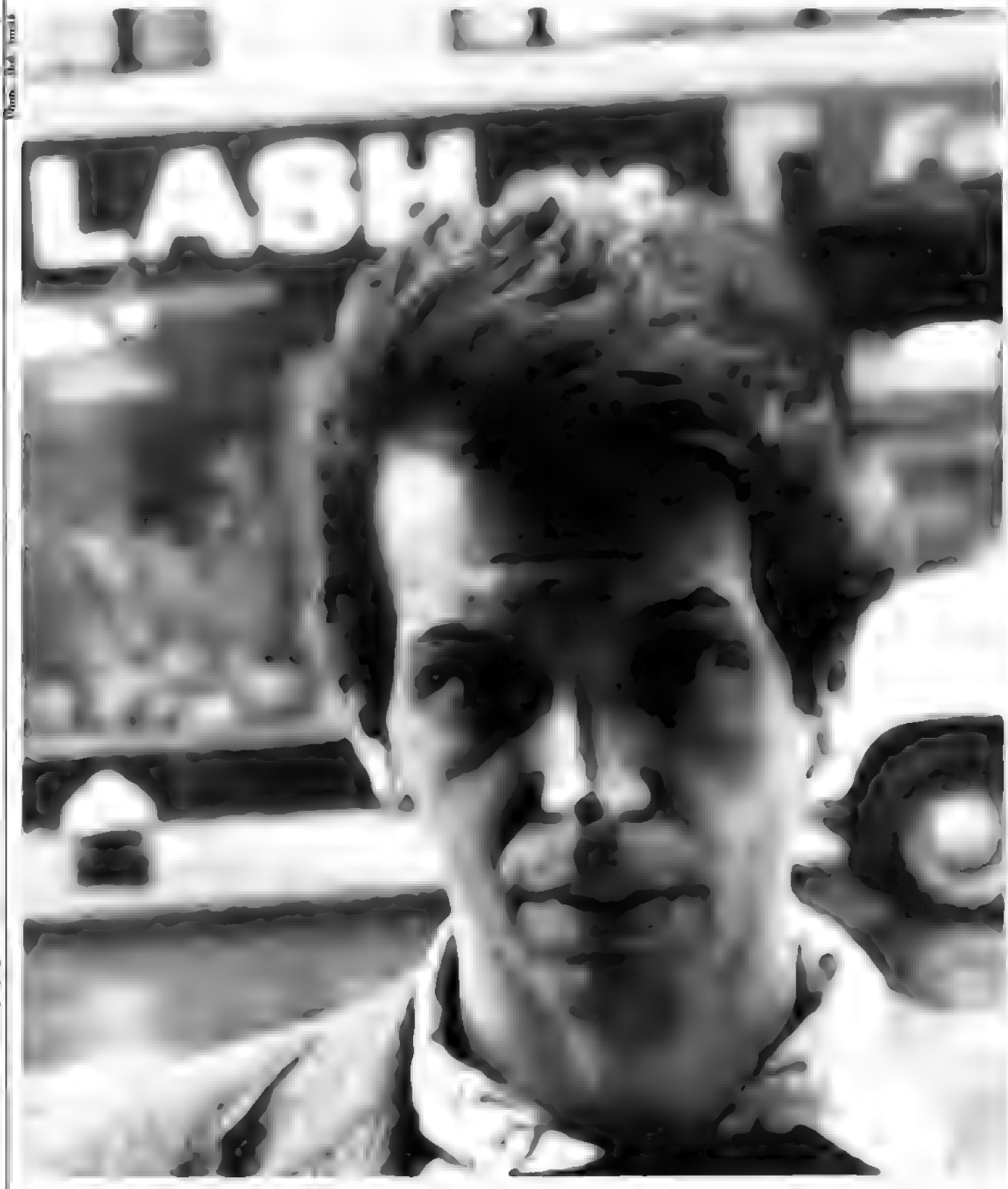
"I thought I should do something



BATTON

All artwork/material accompanying this interview is © 1988 Batton Lash

about attorneys just to grab their eye."

The old line "See you in the funny papers" applies to Batton Lash, the Brooklyn based commercial artist whose long-running comic strip, WOLFF & BYRD, COUNSELORS OF THE MACABRE, chronicles the adventures of attorneys Allana Wolff and J. Sutton Byrd, defenders of vampires, werewolves and the other assorted creatures of the night as they run afoul of the legal system. Kind of an offbeat concept for a comic strip, but besides running weekly in THE BROOKLYN PAPER since the late 1970s, it also appears regularly in THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL and AMERICAN FANTASY MAGAZINE.

When Batton first sold it to his local paper, he didn't fall into the trap of thinking that the only market for his creations was in a newspaper, and so he's been able to find a broader audience for his work. Though he has no dreams of becoming a comic-book artist or writer, he got to try his hand at both when Wolff and Byrd made a guest appearance in Eclipse Comics' MR. MONSTER #9, and his first "best of" collection of the strips has been published by Andrion Press (available at comic shops for $7.00).

I've talked to Batton many times in the two years he's been associated with AMERICAN FANTASY, but never met him in person, so it seems appropriate that this turned out to be a phone interview. For the sake of clarity I decided to conduct the interview objectively so we wouldn't forget and start talking about his deadlines . . .

NANCY GARCIA: *WOLFF & BYRD's been running almost nine years now.*
BATTON LASH: Right.
NANCY: *How did you get interested in cartooning in the first place?*
BATTON: Well, I've *always* wanted to be a cartoonist, as *long* as I can remember. I've always loved comics and drawing, I was always drawing when I was a kid. I made my own little comic books using my father's stapler and pads and everything, created my own characters, so it's just something I've always *done*. As I got older I just kept pursuing it — until I got to art school, of course. *(Laughter.)*
NANCY: *Where did you go to art school?*
BATTON: I went to the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. I went there *mainly* because everybody anywhere said all of the cartoonists came from Visual Arts, I thought that would be great, so naturally when I started there they had no cartooning courses. The school started as a cartoonist and illustrator school, and as they *grew* they began phasing out the cartooning end of it. By the time I got there there were no cartooning classes for at least five years or so, it was pretty upsetting!

But you learn. I began to learn how to really draw rather than just repeating what I constantly did. Then during my first year the news came in that they were going to get two new cartooning classes and the teachers were **Will Eisner** and **Harvey Kurtzman.** So the little small cartooning class that was in the school included people like **Bob Wiecek,** who's an inker for Marvel now, and **John Holstrom,** who became my best pal my first two years in Visual Arts — and probably my biggest influence, he created PUNK MAGAZINE and his character Bosco appears in various places. We were all *very* excited.
NANCY: *How did you get into newspaper strips rather than comic books?*
BATTON: Well, Visual Arts was a real eye-opener and in retrospect . . . I mean

LASH

"I'm intimidated by lawyers like everyone else."

I was discouraged from being a cartoonist. They didn't think my work was very good, and looking back the work *wasn't* very good. They always said I was very creative and a funny person, had funny ideas, and was willing to stick with something, but the technique and the drawing just wasn't there. That was kind of upsetting. I just moved my energies into a different area. When I graduated I was still interested in drawing — I did a lot of film and video at Visual Arts and I always drew out storyboards — and I flirted with the idea of moving to California to get involved with Hollywood. I was out there for a while and it *didn't* appeal to me, it just wasn't that interesting to me. I still just loved the whole comic medium.

So I came back to New York and the comic-book industry at that time, late 1970s, '77, '78, was pretty dismal, not a real attractive place to work, at least not for me. Not that I had what they were probably looking for anyway, but it just didn't appeal to me. And the undergrounds at the time, being what **Mike Friedrich** was doing with STAR*REACH and a few things that were being called "ground level," I thought were *very* interesting. And at that time the whole business with work for hire was starting, and owning your rights — I wasn't really interested in like drawing GREEN LANTERN for somebody, I'd rather come up with my own character and write and draw that and push it myself. As far as the newspaper strip thing, that came about when I was taking my illustration portfolio around and wound up in a local paper in Brooklyn. The first thing I said to them was, "Do you need a comic strip?" And they said, you know, "Well, work something up and we'll consider it." And that eventually became WOLFF & BYRD.

NANCY: *How did you come up with such an offbeat idea, lawyers representing the creatures of the night?*

BATTON: Well, at the time THE BROOKLYN PAPER distributed mainly on Court Street — have you ever heard of Court Street in Brooklyn? It's *notorious*. It's this drag in downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Heights, where every ambulance chaser, every shyster, has an office. I've met some of the attorneys there, they're very nice — I don't turn my back on them. *(Laughter.)* They're nice but they've got a very very sordid reputation.

NANCY: *Is that where Wolff and Byrd would have their offices?*

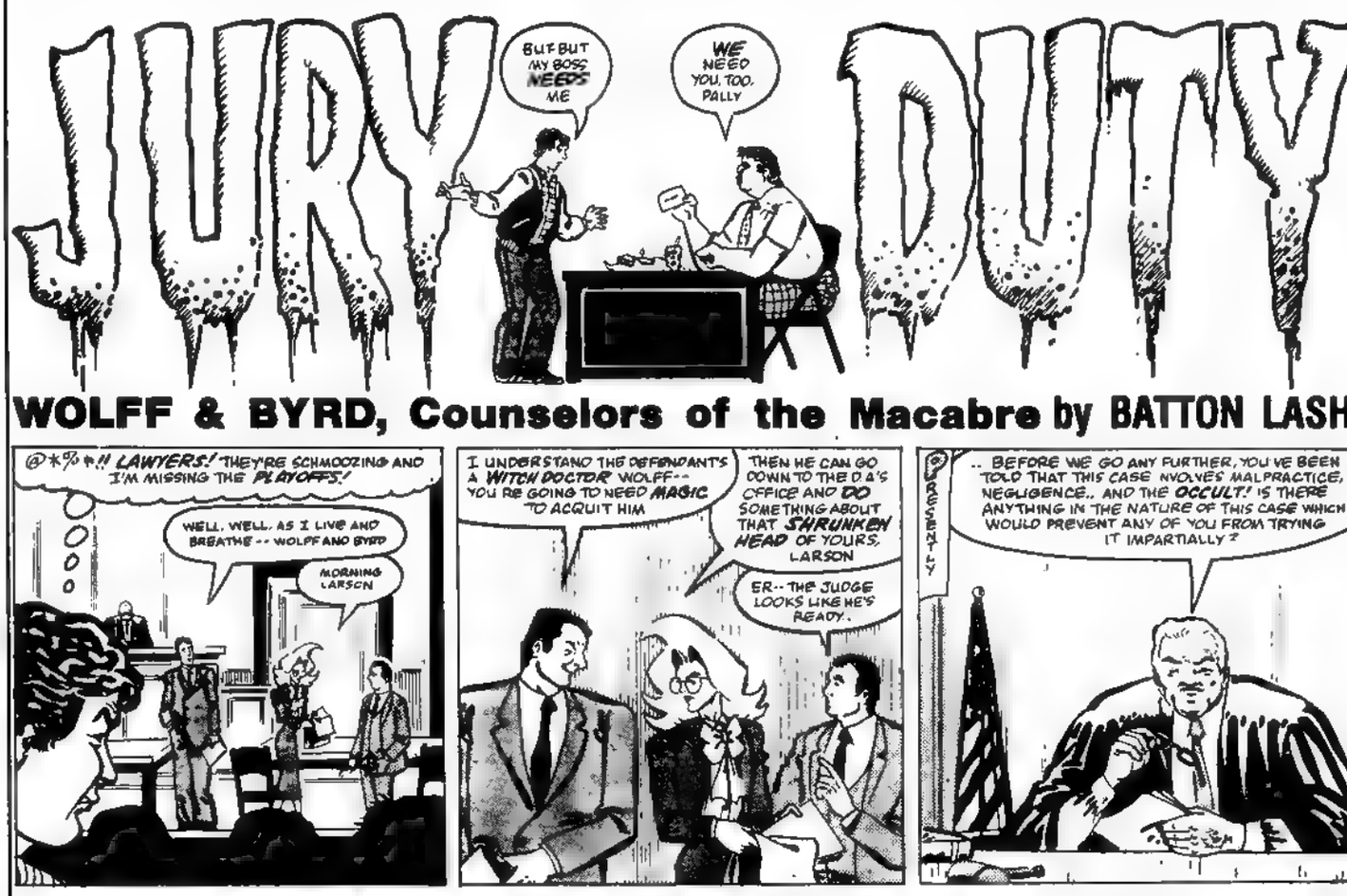
BATTON: Originally they had their offices there. Oddly enough in the strip I'm doing now they've finally moved to Park Avenue, they're subleasing for awhile. So yeah, they started out on Court Street. At the time THE BROOKLYN PAPER distributed mainly to all of the Court Street offices and businesses. I noticed that just about every single office was an attorney, so I thought if these were the paper's readers I should do something about attorneys just to grab their eye, maybe get some response. Then I thought I'd have them defend monsters because . . . I don't think anyone would *really* be too interested . . . I mean obviously, you've seen my artwork, I'm not a very realistic illustrator like **Stan Drake** or **Alex Raymond** or **Lou Fine** — so if I made it monsters it could be goofy, something that was maybe fun to read, rather than dealing with the problems that they're dealing with anyway.

NANCY: *Have you always been a punster?*

BATTON: Yes! *(Laughter.)* From the beginning, I was like the *terror* of my family.

NANCY: *How do you get the legal stuff — you're not a lawyer —*

BATTON: No, not at all. I always was self-conscious about that. In the beginning I bought a legal dictionary, so I would just try to play off stuff from that. Then I started reading some legal accounts and tried to just like work that dialogue. I was just shooting from the hip. I just tried to create an aura of realism. In the beginning


JURY DUTY
BUT BUT MY BOSS NEEDS ME
WE NEED YOU, TOO, PALLY
WOLFF & BYRD, Counselors of the Macabre by BATTON LASH
@*%#!! LAWYERS! THEY'RE SCHMOOZING AND I'M MISSING THE PLAYOFFS!
WELL, WELL, AS I LIVE AND BREATHE -- WOLFF AND BYRD
MORNING LARSON
I UNDERSTAND THE DEFENDANT'S A WITCH DOCTOR WOLFF-- YOU'RE GOING TO NEED MAGIC TO ACQUIT HIM
THEN HE CAN GO DOWN TO THE D.A.'S OFFICE AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT SHRUNKEN HEAD OF YOURS, LARSON
ER-- THE JUDGE LOOKS LIKE HE'S READY.
PRESENTLY
.. BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER, YOU'VE BEEN TOLD THAT THIS CASE INVOLVES MALPRACTICE, NEGLIGENCE.. AND THE OCCULT! IS THERE ANYTHING IN THE NATURE OF THIS CASE WHICH WOULD PREVENT ANY OF YOU FROM TRYING IT IMPARTIALLY?

"The high point was I got to meet Milton Caniff."

it was *incredibly* inaccurate. Then I started sitting in on trials, because all of the courts are in downtown Brooklyn. I'd sit in on criminal court, civil court, just sit there and watch how the attorneys moved, what they'd say. I just tried to get a *feel.* At one point I shared a studio with **Steve Mitchell,** the DC Comics inker, and he was *flabbergasted* that I would spend my vacation in court. *(Laughter.)* I took that opportunity to spend five days sitting in a courtroom, at the time I had a nine-to-five job in advertising

NANCY: *Now WOLFF & BYRD appears also in THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL, how did you make that?*

BATTON: Well *that* . . . I'm intimidated by lawyers like everyone else, but differently. The strip was running for four years in THE BROOKLYN PAPER and I got a phone call from **Kim Robinson,** the editor-in-chief at THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL, and he said, "Look, I'm not making any promises, but I like your strip, would you want to propose it to THE LAW JOURNAL?" Me, my great business sense, I said, "Is this a joke?" *(Laughter.)* I had never *heard* of THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL. So he says it's no joke — I mean he's a very very nice guy and he's been incredibly supportive and, as it turns out, very important to my career, I have a lot to thank him for. He said, "No, I'm not joking, why don't you put together something, propose the strip to us, and we'll consider it. I really like it, I've been following it from the vampire dentist story" — which I had done in 1980 and this was somewhere in '81.

I was shocked. I had no idea that I had an audience out there. In this day and age I think a cartoonist is very aware of his audience, but I've always felt that I was a throwback to the days of, "Is anyone out there?" *(Laughter.)* I didn't *know.* Occasionally I'd get a letter, but I had no idea who read the strip. A lot of times I just wrote and drew it for myself, like it would be something I would like to read. So whenever I *hear* from someone I'm always shocked. A letter will get hung up in front of me for at least a week! *(Laughter.)*

NANCY: *You've done some self-promotion stuff, I know there's buttons and there was a flier you put out awhile ago.*

BATTON: Well, I was trying to see who my audience was because at one point, before THE LAW JOURNAL, the strip was going to be dropped by THE BROOKLYN PAPER because *they* had no idea who was reading it. It was kind of weird. I think they were all expecting a gag-a-day strip, but I always loved the continuity strips. Now I admit I sort of take a lot of liberties with the continuity of the strip, because I'm weekly and my stories run for about six weeks, and I try to get a lot of story in the one weekly installment.

But originally the publisher of THE BROOKLYN PAPER, **Ed Weintraub,** he scratched his head a lot and said, "Well, I don't know what you're doing but if you get it here on time we'll run it." He has come around to really appreciate the strip, and he too has been very very supportive, but originally they expected a gag-a-day strip. At one point the talk was maybe they would drop the strip, so at my own expense I had buttons created — the original buttons being I'M DEFENDED BY WOLFF & BYRD, COUNSELORS OF THE MACABRE with a shot of Wolff and Byrd and the name of THE BROOKLYN PAPER — and I just put in the strip, "Send in for your free button." The response was pretty good, like close to 100 Of course that made me *broke* for that period. *(Laughter.)* But I didn't care A lot of cards came in. A judge wanted 15 buttons for his staff, I was really thrilled This was back in 1980. So every few years I'll do what I call a button drive just to see if they're still out there, and the response always gets better

NANCY: *Do you draw WOLFF & BYRD all by yourself, do all of the production on it yourself?*

BATTON: Yeah, I do, except for the lettering. The lettering's done by a gentleman by the name of **Rick Parker,** a *terrific* letterer, and he's behind the strip 100%.

NANCY: *Has he been with it from the beginning?*

BATTON: No, my first main letterer was **Victor Gorelick,** who again was also very important to my career. At the time he was

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"I liked their work, people like John C. Murphy."

lettering my strip he'd just been appointed editor-in-chief at Archie Comics, and he told me, "I don't letter no more but I'm gonna letter your strip 'cause I like it." I really really appreciated that. He was always very helpful. Around three years ago Archie Comics moved from First Avenue up to Mamaroneck, New York, and he was *still* willing to do the strip. But after awhile that began to get a little bit of a chore. He still wanted to do it but I was having trouble just getting it done in time for him to pick it up.

NANCY: *How long does it take you to do an average, what is it, four- or five-panel strip?*

BATTON: I try to keep it down to five panels now. After the book came out I saw, my God, I would try to cram nine panels in a week. It's a little bit more of a discipline to say everything you've got to say in five panels. But to answer you question . . . well, I write it out well in advance, and I try to write out all six episodes on thumbnail sketches, then do a rough draft on bond paper, and that takes a week.

NANCY: *And you've been doing a lot of other things, too. The list of places where you've appeared includes THE WASHINGTON POST, WOMEN'S WORLD — LIFE MAGAZINE!*

BATTON: The thing in LIFE MAGAZINE was a part of the "Hands Across America" benefit. The Museum of Cartoon Art had invited a lot of cartoonists to contribute their characters holding hands. It was *very* exciting for *me* because I got to meet a lot of people whose work I've always admired. It was thrilling enough to do Wolff and Byrd holding hands with other cartoon characters, but the high point was I got to meet **Milton Caniff.** That was just really a treat, he was just *really* nice and very very open. He spoke to me for a long time.

The thing that bothered me, though, was a lot of so-called hotshot artists from the comic-book world . . . I mean the *attitude*, their attitude, was just incredibly *annoying* and condescending and rotten. The old-timers, like people who have been in the strip business for *years*, the real old-time professionals, they were sweet and generous with their time and very very . . . like they were *surprised* when I told them I liked their work. People like **John Cullen Murphy** who does PRINCE VALIANT, **Caniff** — people like that, you don't *have* to tell these people their work is good. But the young turks, they just got on my nerves, but I didn't let it ruin anything for me.

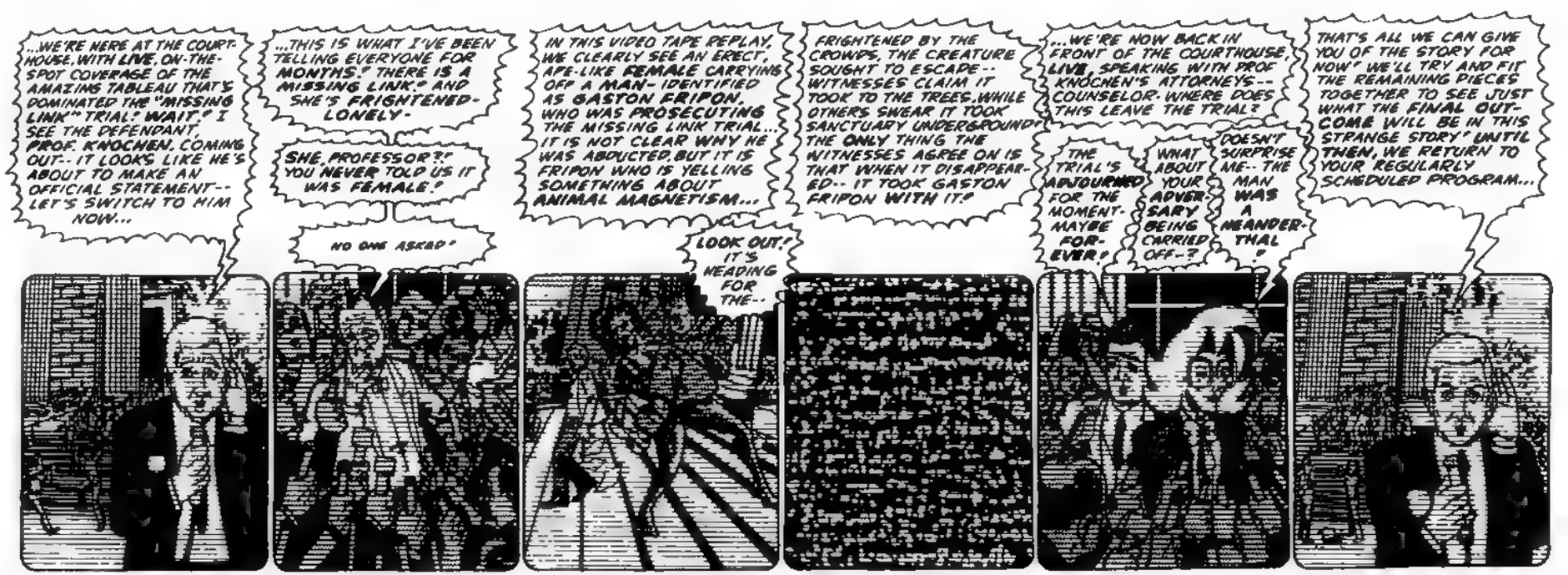
NANCY: *The last couple of years WOLFF*

BROOKLYN BROBDINGNAGIAN MAX GOLAYTH (SOME GARGANTUAN PUT TO TV RADIATIONS) DISCOVERS HIS PROBLEMS ARE BIGGER...
GOLAYTH, WE'RE YOUR ATTORNEYS! COME DOWN BEFORE WE HAVE TO GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO CLEAR YOU!
MR. GOLAYTH! COOPERATE AND THE LAW WILL BE LENIENT...WITHIN MEASURE, OF COURSE!
HONEY, PLEASE LISTEN TO THEM! BE RATIONALE! YOU USED TO BE SO DOWN TO EARTH!
FOR WHAT? TO BE PUT IN SOME FREAK SHOW? I WON'T SELL MYSELF SHORT! IF THEY DON'T LIKE IT-- LET 'EM TRY AND STOP ME!
GROAN! I WAS AFRAID HE'D SAY THAT..!
THIS LOOKS BIGGER THAN WE THOUGHT..!
GOLAYTH! THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE! WE WILL LAUNCH A FULL SCALE ATTACK ON YOU IF YOU DO NOT SURRENDER ON THE COUNT OF TEN!

"Will Eisner called it a great piece of work

GRADUATE GORDON LUBBER MEETS WITH OLD FRIENDS WOLFF & BYRD TO TELL THEM HOW HE BECAME A FRONT RUNNER...
"FRIENDS WERE ADVISING ME TO BOW OUT OF THE RACE – AND I WAS AFRAID THEY WERE RIGHT! I HAD NO RECORD AND NO BOOST – BUT ONE NIGHT...
IT WAS ABOUT A MONTH BEFORE THE PRIMARY...
WE DIDN'T INTRODUCE HIMSELF – HE JUST SAT DOWN AND UNROLLED HIS CHARTS. HIS LISTS, HIS MAPS HE KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYBODY – EVERYBODY REGISTERED TO VOTE...!
YOU MAY BE THE RIGHT MAN – AND I CAN NAME IT THE RIGHT TIME. I CAN TURN STRAW INTO GOLD!
"I HAD NOTHING TO LOSE, SO I WENT ALONG WITH HIM...
I'M GLAD YOU AGREE – THERE'S 100,000 RECORDS OF YOUR CAMPAIGN LIT IN THE MAIL TONIGHT...
THE FOLLOWING MORNING I THOUGHT IT HAD ALL BEEN A DREAM – UNTIL I OPENED MY MAILBOX! A CAMPAIGN PIECE I'D NEVER SEEN WAS THERE – AND MY FACE WAS PLASTERED ON EVERY LAMPPOST IN THE CITY! WITHIN A WEEK, MY MAJOR OPPONENT IN THE PRIMARY WAS THROWN OFF THE BALLOT!
LUBBER
VOTE
GORDON LUBBER
"THE NEXT TIME I SAW HIM WAS THE NIGHT I WON THE PRIMARY – HE CONGRATULATED ME AND SHOWED ME THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN HE HAD ALL MAPPED OUT...
HMM, GORDON, WHAT IS HE ASKING FOR PAYMENT..."
WELL...
HE UM, SAID HE WOULD SETTLE IT WITH ME LATER
UH-OH...
QUIFF, ASHLEY AND HOWIE CONVERGE TO FIND RHONDA AND BIRD AND RESCUE THEM FROM HOW THEY'RE GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS ONE...
RHONDA SOUNDED LIKE SHE WAS IN SOME BAR...!
HMMM – I KNOW A FEW PLACES THAT MIGHT BE OPEN AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT
THEN LET'S SPLIT UP AND COVER AS MUCH GROUND AS WE CAN
OH NO – IT'S TOO DANGEROUS AND YOU'RE –
– YOU'RE NOT GOING OFF BY YOURSELF EVER AGAIN
THEN LET'S GO TOGETHER. NOW!
WHERE ARE THEY? WHERE THE @#%&X! AM I?! IT MUST BE 4 A.M. AND I'M IN THE RAW LOOKING FOR RHONDA – AGAIN! THIS IS THE END! SHE'S NOT GOING TO GET ME MIXED UP IN MORE OF HER...
OWWW! GET AWAY, YOU – YOU BEAST!
PLEAD, MY PRETTY – IT'S ONLY FITTING FOR AN ATTORNEY, EH?
HEY!! WHAT...?
HOWIE?!
A FRIEND OF YOURS? HE LOOKS LIKE A LAWYER TO ME.
AND THERE'S MORE THAN ENOUGH AROUND HERE TO SUIT ME!

"WHO CONTROLS THE PAST CONTROLS THE FUTURE..." WROTE GEORGE ORWELL AND IT MIGHT VERY WELL APPLY TO EON-- AN ENVIRONMENTAL OSCILLATING NUMERATOR -A TIME MACHINE THAT CAN TRANSFORM ITS SURROUNDINGS TO ANY CHOSEN YEAR! SUCH AN INVENTION WOULD BE A MIRACLE OF MODERN SCIENCE, NO?
THINK YOU CAN IMAGINE THE SHAKEUP OVER FIRST OVER!
1917
1959
1945
1929
1962
1972
1886
1912
1963
1948
1865
HMPH... I'D JUST LIKE TO GO BACK TO SEE HOW SECURITY WAS APPOINTED AROUND HERE"
NEVER MIND THAT LOOK AT WHERE THE YIPPIE AND THE NAZI ARE..!
YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD BACK TO 1933? BUMMER, MAN-- I'VE ALREADY SET IT FOR 1967!
SCHWINE-HUND! I OUGHT TO--
CLICK CLICK CLICK
OUTASITE! IT WORKS! BUT THAT MUSIC..?
MEIN GOTT! THAT SLAB..!
WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US?!"
'S KARMA, MAN!
BOOM!
WHEW WHAT HAPPENED, WOLFF?
THE STRAIN WAS TOO MUCH FOR EON, BYRD! THE YIPPIE LONGED TO AVOID 1984 BY TAKING THE WORLD BACK SEVENTEEN YEARS TO 1967-- BUT IN HIS HASTE...
...ACCIDENTALLY SET IT AHEAD SEVENTEEN YEARS!


...WE'RE HERE AT THE COURTHOUSE, WITH LIVE, ON-THE-SPOT COVERAGE OF THE AMAZING TABLEAU THAT'S DOMINATED THE "MISSING LINK" TRIAL! WAIT," I SEE THE DEFENDANT, PROF. KNOCHEN, COMING OUT-- IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S ABOUT TO MAKE AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT-- LET'S SWITCH TO HIM NOW...
...THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN TELLING EVERYONE FOR MONTHS." THERE IS A MISSING LINK." AND SHE'S FRIGHTENED-LONELY-
SHE, PROFESSOR?! YOU NEVER TOLD US IT WAS FEMALE!
NO ONE ASKED"
IN THIS VIDEO TAPE REPLAY, WE CLEARLY SEE AN ERECT, APE-LIKE FEMALE CARRYING OFF A MAN- IDENTIFIED AS GASTON FRIPON, WHO WAS PROSECUTING THE MISSING LINK TRIAL... IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY HE WAS ABDUCTED, BUT IT IS FRIPON WHO IS YELLING SOMETHING ABOUT ANIMAL MAGNETISM...
LOOK OUT! IT'S HEADING FOR THE--
FRIGHTENED BY THE CROWDS, THE CREATURE SOUGHT TO ESCAPE-- WITNESSES CLAIM IT TOOK TO THE TREES, WHILE OTHERS SWEAR IT TOOK SANCTUARY UNDERGROUND! THE ONLY THING THE WITNESSES AGREE ON IS THAT WHEN IT DISAPPEARED-- IT TOOK GASTON FRIPON WITH IT!"
...WE'RE NOW BACK IN FRONT OF THE COURTHOUSE, LIVE, SPEAKING WITH PROF KNOCHEN'S ATTORNEYS-- COUNSELOR-WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE THE TRIAL?
THE TRIAL'S ADJOURNED FOR THE MOMENT-MAYBE FOREVER!
WHAT ABOUT YOUR ADVERSARY BEING CARRIED OFF-?
DOESN'T SURPRISE ME-- THE MAN WAS A NEANDERTHAL!
THAT'S ALL WE CAN GIVE YOU OF THE STORY FOR NOW" WE'LL TRY AND FIT THE REMAINING PIECES TOGETHER TO SEE JUST WHAT THE FINAL OUTCOME WILL BE IN THIS STRANGE STORY" UNTIL THEN, WE RETURN TO YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAM...

— I can't tell you what that meant to me."

"They're not warlocks, they're not

WOLFF & BYRD
COUNSELORS
of the
MACABRE

A SONG OF A PITIFUL POOR

GAWDAWFUL THING

(An American Folk-Law)

Words & Pictures:
BATTON LASH
Music:
TRADITIONAL

Hear Ye, Hear Ye!
This here song's
'bout a brute who meant
no wrong
It was big 'n ugly, that's no lie
—but heck, It wouldn't hurt a fly
It was all the news, this thing
that oozed—
with colors of green & brown
ARTIST'S RENDERING
The day It threw caution to
the wind—
and clambered into town

& BYRD's been getting a lot wider exposure, it's been picked up in AMERICAN FANTASY MAGAZINE Those aren't the same strips that are running in —

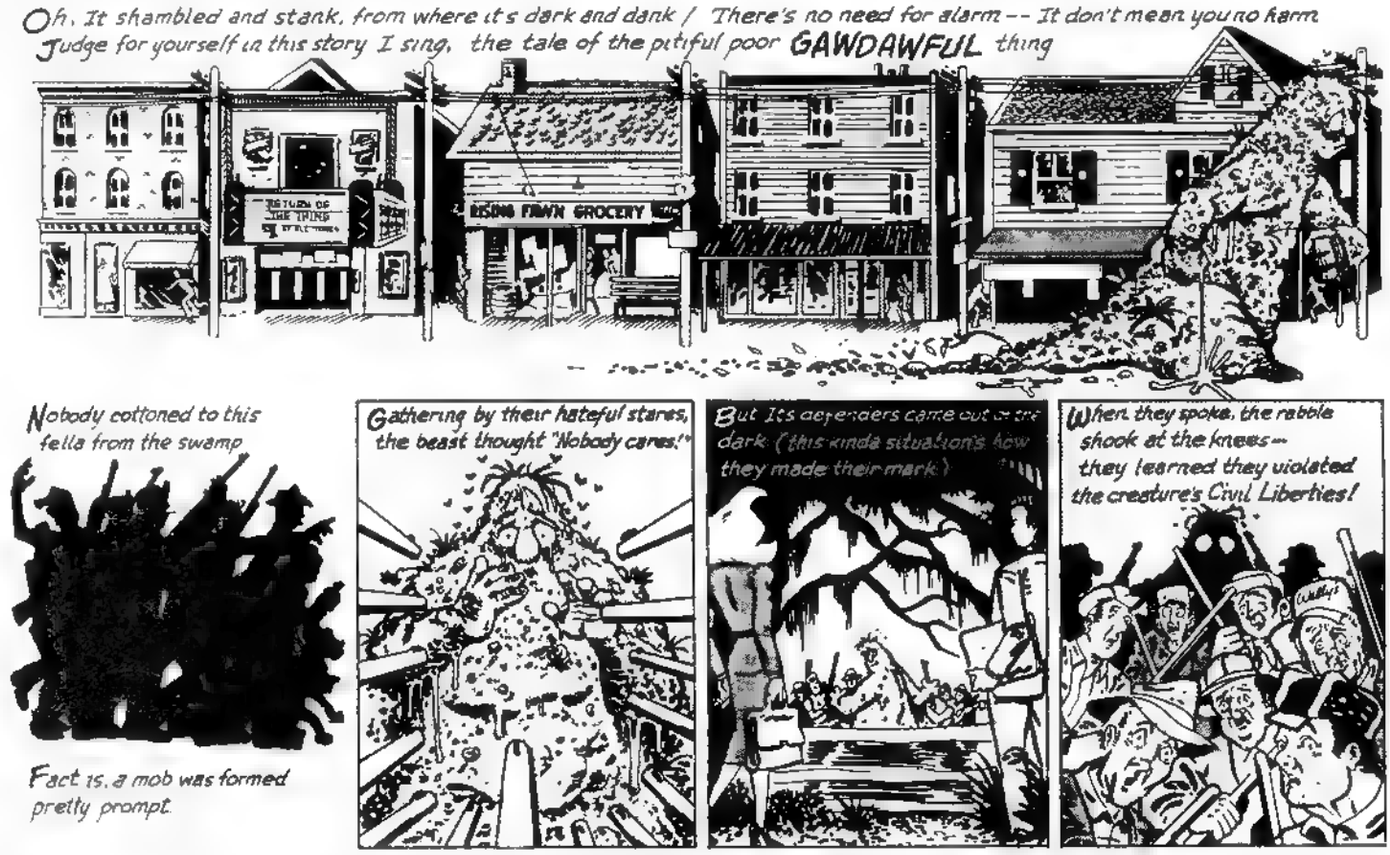
BATTON: No, not at all, that was *another* one of my sharp business deals Well, this goes back to my publicity. At one point I wanted to just get the word out — I'm *always* trying to syndicate the strip myself — so I put together some press releases to see if I could get some press on it, get some clips to include into my syndication package One of them was AMERICAN FANTASY, earlier, volume one That was '85. Just about a year later I heard from **Bob Garcia** saying he was starting up AMERICAN FANTASY volume two, a *slick* production, and he wanted to include a comic strip and this one appealed to him. I'm most grateful for that. *(Laughter.)*

But it appealed to him, and what he wanted to do was run the strips I do for THE LAW JOURNAL on one page, like I guess all six to a page, because AMERICAN FANTASY would be a quarterly so you would try to get the whole story there. Just around that time I had signed a contract to do the book and he had the rights to all of the strips up to that point, so I couldn't do that. So I said to Bob, "Look, I'll do *new* strips for you." He goes, "Well, if you do that I'll give you two pages." So I said, "Okay, great." And it's always more exciting, I think, to do stuff for the format of the magazine rather than just printed strips on just one page It's different when you do a book collection, but for a magazine I think it should be more to try to match the look of the magazine.

NANCY: *Your book just came out this year, right?*

BATTON: That's right. It's been in production I think since the dawn of time, but it's *finally* out. Actually **Mark Bilgrey**, the publisher, approached me in early 1986 and it came out late last year and began to hit the stores in March of '88.

NANCY: *Is this a collection of* all *of the early strips?*


Oh, It shambled and stank, from where it's dark and dank / There's no need for alarm -- It don't mean you no harm
Judge for yourself in this story I sing, the tale of the pitiful poor GAWDAWFUL thing
RISING FROWN GROCERY
Nobody cottoned to this
fella from the swamp
Fact is, a mob was formed
pretty prompt
Gathering by their hateful stares,
the beast thought "Nobody cares."
But its defenders came out of the
dark (this kinda situation's how
they made their mark)
When they spoke, the rabble
shook at the knees—
they learned they violated
the creature's Civil Liberties!

witches, they're just attorneys."

BATTON: No no no, it's what I like to think of as the best of the strip. The *early* strips, like say the first four years, aren't represented. I felt I was still feeling my way around, the artwork was too crude, the legal stuff was a little too inaccurate, I just couldn't get by it, and it wouldn't be really fair to foist that on the rest of the world. So the collection sort of begins with THE LAW JOURNAL's run, which started in '83. And for THE LAW JOURNAL I redid my vampire dentist story that originally appeared in THE BROOKLYN PAPER. I always get annoyed when collections aren't complete but I think this one is different because it's not that . . . each story *ends*, you can read a story complete unto itself, rather than reading day one constantly. I would love to do from the very beginning, but I think there's going to have to be a lot of *die-hard* fans of WOLFF & BYRD before that comes out.

NANCY: *Is the book available through the comics market?*

BATTON: It's being distributed to comic-book stores or mail order.

NANCY: *What kind of response have you been getting to it?*

BATTON: Well, like I said earlier, I've often felt that I don't really know who my audience is out there, but since the book has been out there has been some mail order and the response has been pretty good I'm really really gratified with that, it's really been very nice. I know we sent some review copies out to get some quotes to help publicize the book, my old teacher **Will Eisner** called it a great piece of work — I can't tell you what that *meant* to me. Way back in Visual Arts he pulled me aside and said, "Batton, is there anything else you want to do in life?" *(Laughter.)* So he said that he was happy with how far I've progressed, it was very gratifying I felt like, you know, 13 years later I finally graduated his class.

And **Harvey Kurtzman** wrote me back a nice letter, he liked the legal angle and was very encouraging It was just terrific. **Harvey Pekar,** whose work I just admire, I think he's doing the next step for comics, the autobiographical strip; he wrote and said that he liked WOLFF & BYRD better than most other comic strips, that meant a lot So the response was just terrific The best was **Michael Gilbert** who did a parody of **Stephen King's** famous quote about **Clive Barker** — "I've seen the future of humor in horror comics and his name is **Batton Lash.**" *(Laughter.)*

NANCY: *Is that how Michael Gilbert came to ask you to do a guest appearance in MR. MONSTER?*

BATTON: No. What happened was around a year and a half ago — and I've *always* like **Michael Gilbert's** work, before MR MONSTER. Earlier I mentioned the period when I felt comics weren't too exciting, that late '70s period, but **Mike Friedrich** was doing some interesting things with STAR*REACH, and he was publishing **Michael Gilbert** and that's where I first saw his work. I thought he was really good, really terrific. It was actually in many ways I really identified with what he was doing. I sort of assumed we were the same age, probably had the same influences, he probably was the terror of his household with the puns,, too, so I always felt there was like a kinship between us.

When MR. MONSTER came out I picked it up, thought it was terrific, and he always encouraged readers to send in drawings, letters, all that sort of thing, so finally at one point I figured maybe I could get a plug for WOLFF & BYRD — by this time WOLFF & BYRD was running — and I drew this cartoon of Wolff & Byrd standing before a monster, a thing with tentacles, and Kelly is telling Mr. Monster, "Watch it, Doc, it's got it's lawyers." I figured the *best* that might come out of it is he'll print the cartoon, plug the strip, that'll be great. A couple of months later I get this card from **Mike Gilbert** apologizing for not answering me sooner and saying why don't I write an eight-page story around that idea.

I was *thrilled!* I did not expect that, it was just tremendous. So we eventually started calling each other. I said, "Do you want me to use Wolff and Byrd?" He said, "Yeah, go ahead, put Wolff and Byrd in it." I said, "Do you want me to write it?" He goes, "No, write *and* draw it." I go, "Who's gonna ink it?" He goes, "Do the whole thing, just go ahead." So I did I did the same process I do with THE LAW JOURNAL. I did layouts on bond paper and sent them to Mike, he made some changes in dialogue, in fact *enough* changes that we both got scripting credit. He was just a joy to work with, it was just a lot of fun. I'm not really very good at collaborations, either, but that was a lot of fun. It was a learning experience, too. It was my first comic-book story, so it was different — an eight-page story. And of course there was a tremendous deadline crunch on it, but it was fun. And just seeing the characters in color for the first time was sort of weird, too

Oh, it shambled and stank, but a complaint it made frank / The freak they sought wants to take 'em to court!
Who knows what the future will bring— when you're sued by a GAWDAWFUL thing?

NANCY: *Did you do the coloring?*

BATTON: That was Michael's colorist. I *suggested* what Wolff and Byrd should wear, like they're attorneys so they can't be that colorful, they're kind of conservative. You know, the whole trick to WOLFF & BYRD is that they're not warlocks, they're not witches, they're *just* attorneys. I know every attorney out there is going to kill me for this — *(Laughter.)* But they're, you know, just average people that tend to defend the supernatural.

NANCY: *Allana Wolff has a kind of a look to her, though.*

BATTON: Well, the perfect woman, what do you want *(Laughter.)* At least to me. She was based on a couple of people. Her face is based on **Sally Kellerman,** the actress, though by this time she's become so stylized I don't know if anyone can see

"WOLFF AND BYRD IS A GREAT PIECE OF WORK..."

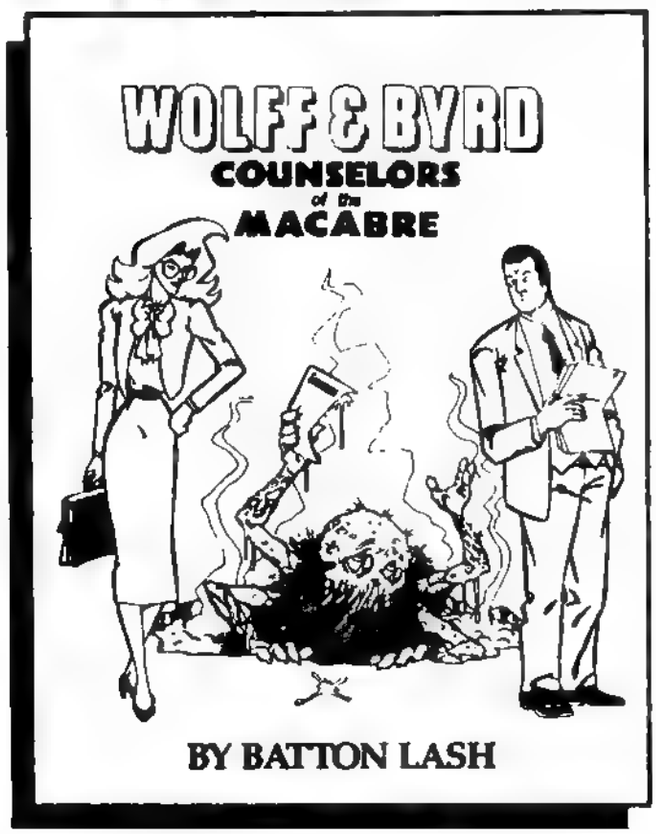
XTRACT FROM THE TRANSCRIPT:
PLAINTIFF DAWN PAPILLA WENT TO TAKE CARE OF A LOST FILLING ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT
MY DENTIST IS A VAMPIRE!!
SHOW THE JURY THE SCARS THAT FIEND INFLICTED ON YOU!
GASP!
YOUR HONOR! MAY THE DEFENSE TAKE THE STAND?
LOOK AT THAT JURY, MR. BYRD! THEY ALL REMEMBER THEIR BRACES!!
PATIENCE, DOCTOR.
PROCEED...

-WILL EISNER
Creator of *The Spirit*

"I LIKED THE LEGAL TOUCH"
-HARVEY KURTZMAN
Creator of *Mad*

"THE FUTURE OF HUMOR IN HORROR COMICS. . ."
-MICHAEL T. GILBERT
Creator of *Mr. Monster*

"WOLFF AND BYRD IS FAR BETTER THAN MOST COMIC STRIPS."
-HARVEY PEKAR
Author of
American Splendor



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"I was approached by New World to do a TV series."

the **Kellerman** connection there. Her figures are based on someone I had known in Visual Arts, **Lenore Pidet.** The things that always bothered me, again going back to the late '70s, were women characters were always these va-va-va-*voom* girls that had these hourglass figures and these *tremendous* chests, you know The women I always found attractive were flat-chested and very very very sexy, the bonier the better, so I always wanted to design a character *that* way. So that's how Wolff's look came about And, like I said, I always hope the better I get the more I try to bring this across, that she's really very angular In some of the earlier strips she looks a little *rounder* than she really is, but over the years she works out, she gets sharper looking. *(Laughter)*

NANCY: *Where are you hoping to go with WOLFF & BYRD? Do you have dreams of a comic book of your own?*

BATTON: I go back and forth I see how much fun **Michael Gilbert** has with MR. MONSTER, I mean it must be a lot of fun putting that book together, and I have an idea if I were ever to do a WOLFF & BYRD comic book what it would look like, but the comic-book *market* is so weird. The market likes to preach to the converted. I'd like to hit that main audience. The thing I always liked about doing WOLFF & BYRD was that an audience that doesn't normally read comics reads this strip, whether it's the local audience for THE BROOKLYN PAPER or the attorneys at THE LAW JOURNAL, and AMERICAN FANTASY doesn't have strictly comic-book readers; so the thing I was always concerned was if WOLFF & BYRD ever became a comic book was . . you know, superheroes seem to be the big sellers, even a book like MS. TREE seems to have a hard time hanging in there, so I don't know how they would sell a comic book about two attorneys — everyone hates lawyers, right. *(Laughter.)* I would *love* to try it, even maybe like a comic album, that sounds like fun I'm a little loathe to call them graphic novels, I hate that term, but something like a 48-page book might be a lot of fun. It would be easier to get it into bookstores and market it, I think people still turn their noses up to comic books.

And comics are hard because . . . you'd be surprised how many editors *hate* comics. The editor-in-chief at THE LAW JOURNAL, like I said, has been very supportive to me, but his publisher's always scratching his head and saying, "Do we really *need* this?" And editors are like that. I did some work for THE DAILY NEWS and I spoke to them about their comic page, and they treat it like, "Can you believe this *junk* we have to do, who the hell cares." It's a strange industry. I think there are a lot of closet fans that *love* comic strips and really get a kick out of the medium, and it's sad that newspapers refuse to exploit their comics unless it's something that has TV exposure, like GARFIELD. It's nice to see them supporting something like CALVIN AND HOBBES, which is my favorite new comic strip in I don't know how long. It's nice to see THE DAILY NEWS, which runs it in New York, really supporting it.

NANCY: *Anything else in the works for WOLFF & BYRD?*

BATTON: Well, I've been approached by a syndicate but they wanted me to change it to a gag-a-day thing, didn't want to do a continuity thing. "Can't sell 'em," they say, "just change it to a gag-a-day." Well, that didn't work too well. And I was approached by New World Pictures to do a WOLFF & BYRD TV series, and again the same thing — "It's perfect, let's change it." But we're still talking about it, and they were very interested in the strip. The head of the company was an attorney and he knew the strip, and the lawyer at New World was familiar with the strip; they were aware of the strip, an audience that doesn't normally read comics.

NANCY: *Your fans are everywhere.*

BATTON: *(Laughter.)* I don't know *where* they are, I just hope they stick with it.

NANCY: *One last question, is Batton Lash your real name?*

BATTON: Hold that thought, let me check with my lawyers. *(Laughter.)*

"Oh, my God, I don't think that this is the direction

JUDITH HOAG

April O'Neil, one of the most important roles in TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, went to Judith Hoag, who doesn't look like either the April in the comics or the April in the cartoons. Call it a measure of her talent. Or take the words of producer Simon Fields:

"Judith is perfect for her role of April. When we wanted her to start she was still on another picture. So we rearranged our schedules to accomodate hers. That's how important we felt she would be to the success of our film."

And what did Judith think when this project first came up? After hearing the title, she wasn't even interested in reading the script! What changed her mind, why did she agree to take on a comic book character, and what does she think of TMNT now? Read on . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *To start with, let's talk a little bit about how you got this role.*

JUDITH HOAG: What happened was that **Lynn Kressel**, who was casting the film, read the script and thought of me. She said that I would be perfect for it, called my agent, and my agent told me there had been an inquiry as to whether I would read the script to TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES I had *never* heard of this before and thought, "Oh, my God, I don't think that this is the direction I want to be going in, I don't want to do a horror film." *(Laughter.)* And Michael said, "It's *not* a horror film and Lynn says it's really wonderful. I trust her implicitly, you should really read the script." So I said, "Okay, I'll read the script " Then I read it and thought,

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I want to go in — a horror film." *(Laughter.)*

"This is really *wonderful*!" It's got so many elements of fairy tales in it, so I thought, "Yeah, let's do this thing."

I went in and I met Steven and we hit it off pretty well, and I read for him and left. I was shooting another film, CADILLAC MAN which is a new Robin Williams film, and they got in touch with me — but it didn't look like I was going to be able to do it. I had a prior commitment for a series that was shooting in San Francisco, so I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. But I managed — it was sort of a mutual thing — to get out of the series. So I ended up being able to do it. But it was a little hairy for awhile because I started shooting NINJA TURTLES while I was shooting CADILLAC MAN. For awhile, I was just, like, a movie machine. *(Laughter.)* But as an actor, you know, that's the way

"They'd say, 'Oh, fuck you, you're working.'"

that you want it to be.

PAT: *That's right, better not to have any downtime between two performances.*

JUDITH: Yes. Even though at the time you're going, "Oh, God, Oh, God." I was working seven days a week. I had to keep reminding myself that this is what I always *wanted*, so just shut up. If any other actor in New York had heard me they'd say, "Oh, fuck you, you're *working* — that's not *fair*!" *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *"Would you rather be waiting tables?"*

JUDITH: That's right. Fortunately, I haven't had to do that, either.

PAT: *Between the time that you decided you wanted to be in it and when they cast you and you started work in the film, did you have a chance to familiarize yourself at all with the character?*

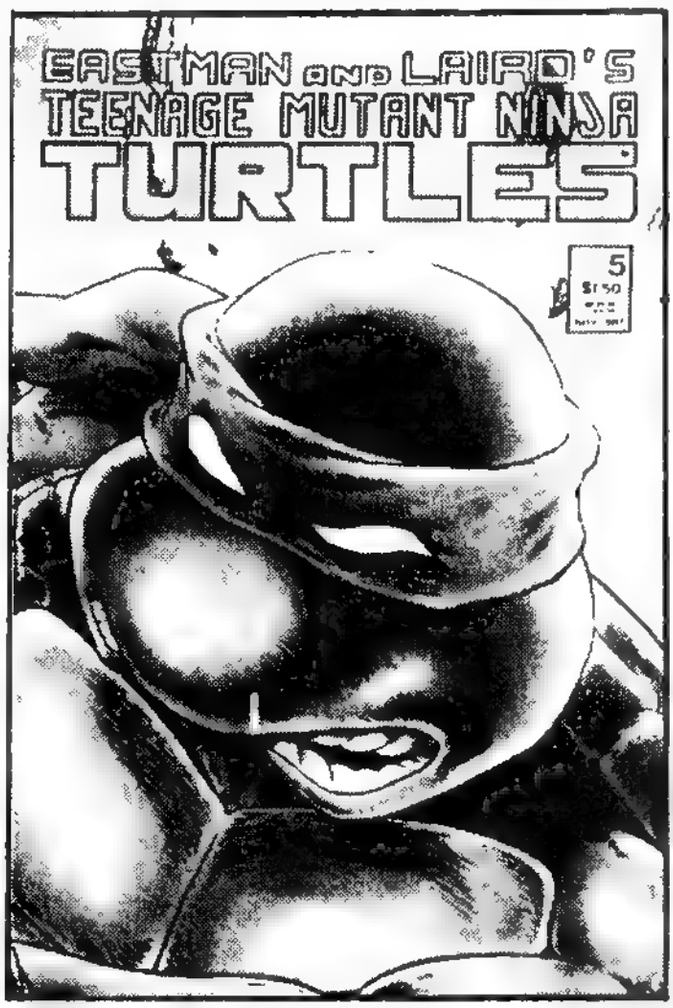
JUDITH: No. The only thing . . . Well, what I found out was — I mentioned it to my brother — my niece watches the cartoon every Saturday morning on television. That's how I found out it's a cartoon. And another friend of mine who collects comic books, has just volumes and volumes of rare editions and first editions and all kinds of things, said that he had a copy of the *first* NINJA TURTLES, which I guess was the black-and-white.

Photo Alan Markfield

April O'Neil (Judith Hoag) is in for quite a surprise when she awakens to her rescuers.

PAT: *Yes.*

JUDITH: The real underground. He explained to me how **Eastman** and **Laird** . . . how it was really sort of a joke and then it ended up turning into something really big. But I really didn't familiarize myself with it too much because I was *so* busy that I didn't have any *time* to think about it. And I also knew that there was a possibility I *wouldn't* be able to do it, because of my schedule. I try to keep



"We used to have MTB, Major Turtle Breakdown."

those sort of things sort of in the background and not get too excited about them. You can get very disappointed if you don't get something that you want.

PAT: *Sure.*

JUDITH: But once I started the film, I went to Toys 'R' Us and they have an *aisle* devoted to — well, *half* an aisle I guess, but the aisles there are *huge* — they've got every kind of NINJA TURTLES thing that you could ever want. One of my favorites was water balloon grenades. *(Laughter.)* We used to have water balloon fights with them. And they've got wrapping paper, tablecloths — I have every Ninja Turtles doll now *except* for April, which you cannot find.

PAT: *Ah. I was going to ask if you'd seen —*

JUDITH: To this day I've never — I've read one comic book and I *glanced* at the cartoon because we were shooting one Saturday morning, all of the monitors were on, and someone switched the dial and turned on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. We actually stopped shooting so that we could watch five minutes of it. *(Laughter.)* I'd never seen it so I said, "Oh, please let me see this." They asked me — I did an interview for MTV — they said, "Well, do you feel that you had to live up to this character?" *(Laughter.)* "No, I don't know who this character is."

And physically we don't resemble each other at all. Physically, April has large breasts and a *very* large butt, and I have neither. And she looks kind of Latin American in the comic book, and she looks very whitebread in the cartoon. When I met Peter he looked at me and he said, "Wow! I never would have thought of it, but you're perfect." *(Laughter.)* And they had seen some dailies and they were really happy, so that made me happy. You know, you don't want people sort of messing with your ideas and not really hitting it, or getting some *bimbo* in there to, like, wreck your character. I think they were pretty pleased.

PAT: *That's good. What was it like doing a movie where your four main costars are human-sized reptiles?*

JUDITH: It's really — well, at first I thought it was going to be very strange. And there were *times* when it was very strange. One of the big things is that the costumes were *brilliant*. They were also unbelievably restricting for the actors. I would go through times when I just would feel *so* bad for them because I knew that they were so hot — we were shooting right in the middle of summer — so I would feel like I just needed to be like their mother and take care of them.

But *also*, they're so *real*. The personality of the actor inside the Turtle, and how each character is written, is so real and so wonderful that a lot of time I would just look at them and be awed and amazed. You almost, in a way — I mean, it depends on how much you can make believe — but you almost forget that this isn't real, because of how real they are. There are no buttons or plugs, you don't see the seams, so there's nothing to remind you that they're not real, that these are costumes, or that this is a computer. They are totally real.

And working with them was just wonderful, because they were absolutely hysterical. They're really very funny, and there's so much humor in it that . . . it was neat, it was neat. I would almost take it over humans. *(Laughter.)* Not quite. The guy who plays Casey, **Elias Koteas**, is brilliant. He was sort of my human ally. And we all had a good time. It was a real smooth cast, which is nice.

PAT: *Were there ever problems with filming, in terms of they'd have to stop because something wasn't working with the costumes or things like that?*

JUDITH: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We used to have something called MTB, Major Turtle Breakdown. *(Laughter.)* You could go for *quite* awhile without doing anything. I'm trying to remember Dave's last name, he created the servos to make the Turtles work. It was *brilliant* stuff, I mean the technology that they worked with in the animatronics. And it's *new*, so part of that's just par for the course —

PAT: *Breaking in the technology?*

JUDITH: Yeah, exactly, it's working on the gaps. And you'd go *hours* with these things. There were times when you just thought, "Oh, God, they're going to break down." And at times it's *so* hot and icky, and you know that if they break down you *might* be able to leave early and have half a day's work. *(Laughter.)* So conversely, sometimes it was an advantage. But for the most part they really worked well. Because they were so sophisticated, they could do the *most* amazing things. And they were so lifelike, the ways that their faces moved, their eyes moved — they even had *tongues*! It's just incredible!

PAT: *Speaking of doing amazing things, this is the kind of film which usually involves a good deal of stuntwork and things like that. Did you have to do any stunts yourself?*

JUDITH: Yes, I did have to do stunts myself! Most of the major stuntwork was done by stuntmen from Hong Kong, and they were *truly* amazing. They would put these suits on — and I guess they're used to doing a lot of kung-fu movies, and conditions aren't . . . there's no *union* there, so the stuntmen and the actors aren't really protected. They work *incredibly* long hours, and if you get hurt you're out of there. So these guys — I'm thinking, "Oh, God, I'm working such long hours." — to these guys it was nothing. And they would just *leap* through the air, fall through ceilings — my entire apartment, every window in it

April, Leonardo and Donatello protect a wounded Raphael from a surprise attack.

Photo: Alan Markfield

"I have a scene where I'm surrounded by Turtles

is broken, skylights are gone. They were just amazing.

What was different, though, is that they have different *heads* on. I would come onto the set and I was never quite sure if we were using the real Turtles or the stunt Turtles, and I'd look at one and think, "Oh, God, there's something wrong with Leonardo!" Then I'd realize it's not Leonardo at all, it's Leonardo's *stuntman*! *(Laughter.)*

There was one stunt that I did that was a little nerve-wracking, but we made it through. It's not going to make me say, "Ha, I can do my own stunts now!" A guy attacks me, he leaps from the top of a ten-foot Winnebago onto the concrete and pulls me down on top of him. Well, this could get a little hairy, and they said I didn't have to do this if I didn't want to; and I thought, "Great, we've only set up for it and everybody's waiting around." It was a little nerve-wracking, but we did it

PAT: *So, basically, it's just knowing how to brace yourself and knowing how to take the fall when —*

JUDITH: And, of course, if I break my arm I know shooting will be delayed for awhile. *(Laughter.)* They were pretty good about it. I had a stunt where they take me across the subway tracks, and I said, "Uh, for this one you can get a stunt double." I figured — knowing some of the things that we went through this summer — the track would be a hot track; and some guy in a Turtle suit would be trying to take me *over* the third rail? I just decided I didn't want to try that.

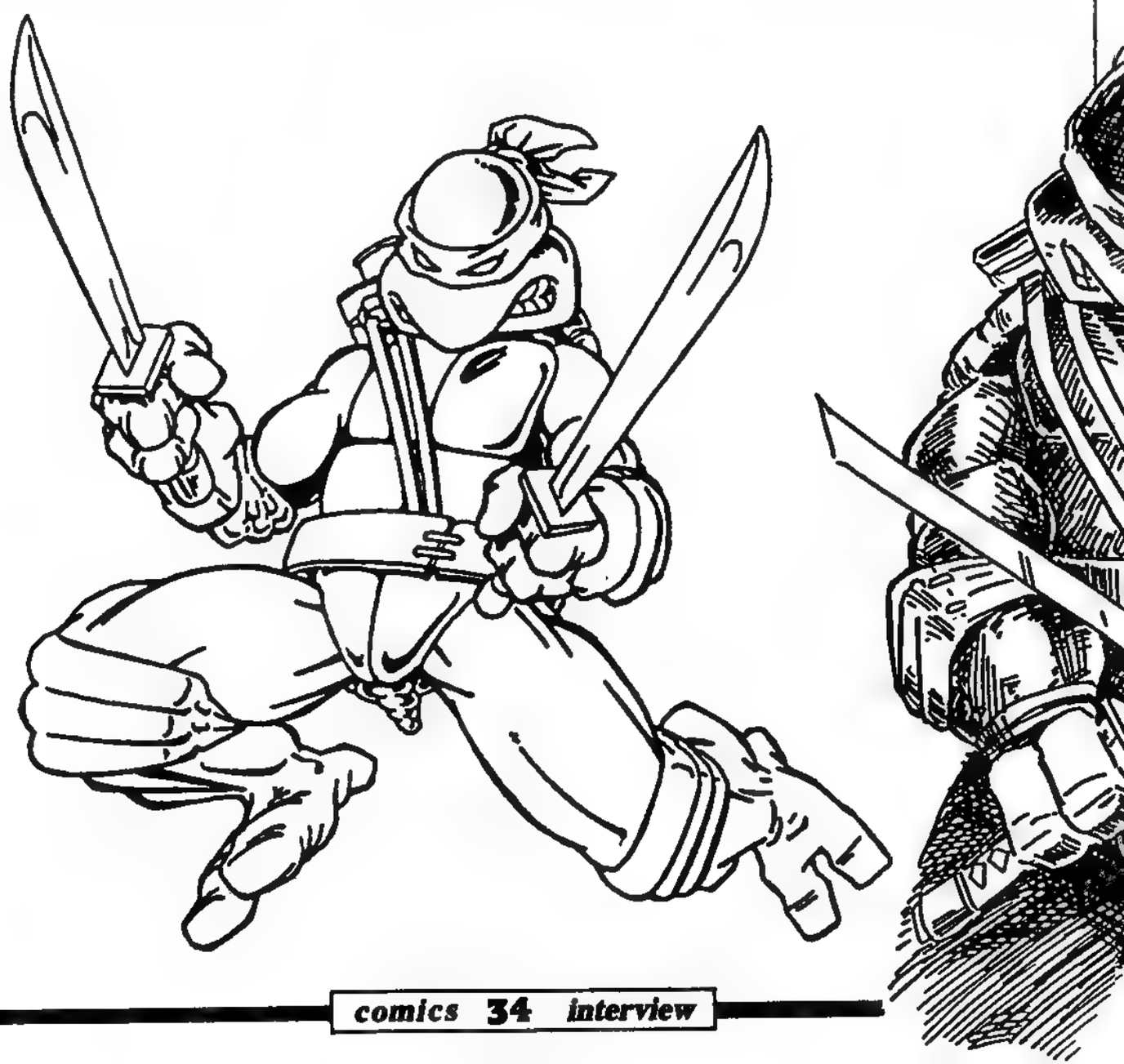
PAT: *Where was most of the filming done?*

JUDITH: It was done at the old **De-Laurentiis** studios, which is now North Carolina Film Studio in Wilmington, North Carolina. Real nice studios. It was also just wonderful being out of the city, being out in the country all summer. It was a pretty good setup there.

PAT: *Tell me a little bit about your background.*

JUDITH: Well, I've been acting for about thirteen years now. I moved to New York about four years ago I've worked in a lot of theatre in Boston, Massachusetts. I came to New York and got *very* lucky right away My first job someone approached me and said, "Would you do my play off Broadway?" I thought, "Ha ha, I just got to the city but I'm not *that* dumb!" And it turned out that it was actually legitimate, and I did that. And a few months later I did a soap opera called LOVING, did that for about a year and a half.

Then I started doing nighttime. I did a SPENCER FOR HIRE, and *lots* of commercials and things. Then I thought, "Well, it's pilot season, let's go see if I can get a pilot." And I got one, something called ELYSIAN FIELDS which showed . . . I guess it was the beginning of this summer It's a wonderful film but



and a four-foot rat, and I completely lose it."

it was a little too *risky* for the network to pick up. I played an agoraphobic valium addict who was sort of a Blanche DuBois southern belle character, and really had a great time doing it. But that didn't go. And then the beginning of this year I did another pilot called WOLF, which is on CBS.

I have not been picked up for the series, which was a good thing in that it allowed me to do NINJA TURTLES and CADILLAC MAN, which is a film that comes out this summer starring **Robin Williams** and **Tim Robbins**. I play my very first bitch in it. *(Laughter.)* That was kind of fun And I also have *another* movie that should be coming out right at the same time as NINJA TURTLES — hopefully the studio that it is in — in San Francisco has not been wiped out by the earthquake It's called A MATTER OF DEGREES It came out of Sundance, **Redford's** place up in Utah, and I have high hopes for that. It's sort of along the lines . . . the same kind of small movie that SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE is, although it's a *completely* different subject matter. Hopefully, it will be received well — although it won't have *nearly* the distribution that NINJA TURTLES will have, probably will only play in the smaller sort of arty theatres.

So, it will be kind of nice because between the spring and the summer there will be three *totally* different characters coming out — hopefully, people won't miss them. People have been saying, "Wow, this is great, you have all of these *movies* coming out." And in the back of my mind I'm hoping that people won't end up saying, "Oh, *you* were in that film? Gosh, we missed you." *(Laughter.)* I don't think they're going to be able to miss me in NINJA TURTLES, though.

PAT: *Yeah, it's a fairly important character.*

JUDITH: Oh, yeah. And it's sort of riproaring comedy at times. Hopefully, we were successful with it.

PAT: *It's . . . I forget who's credited with it, but there's a line that goes, "Dying is easy, comedy is hard."*

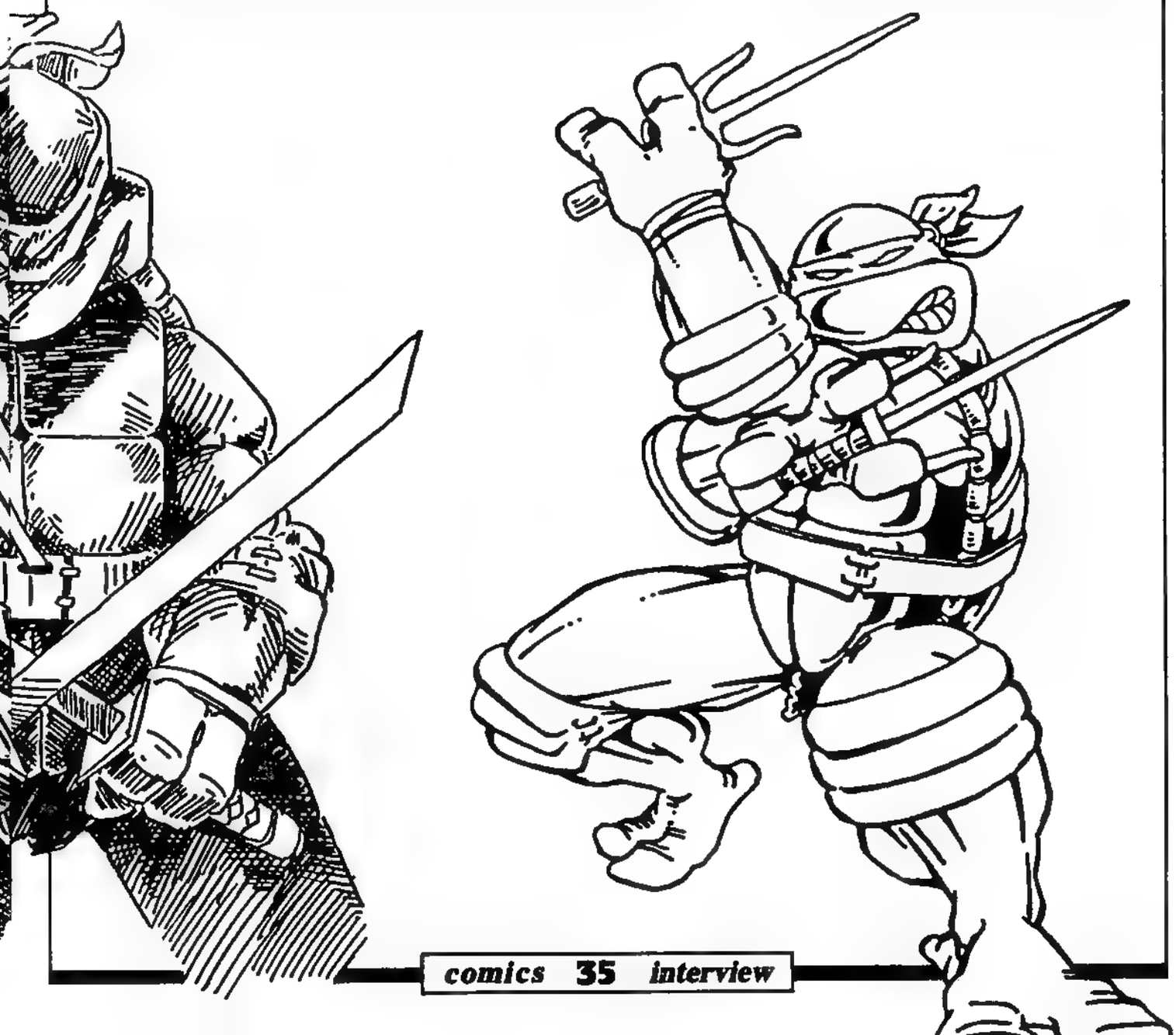
JUDITH: Yeah.

PAT: *And it occurs to me that doing comedy in the midst of what is otherwise an action/adventure film has got to just be, you know*

JUDITH: It's hard

PAT: *As an actress, how do you deal with that?*

JUDITH: Well, I think you have to . . . you just have to be willing to go out there and be willing to look like a jerk I have a scene where I wake up and I'm surrounded by Turtles and a four-foot rat, and I completely lose it. I really had to go as far with that scene as I possibly could. But there's always that thing in your mind that's saying, "I look like a total asshole here." You have to trust and have faith that somehow this is going to work. And also, a lot of it *is* your director.



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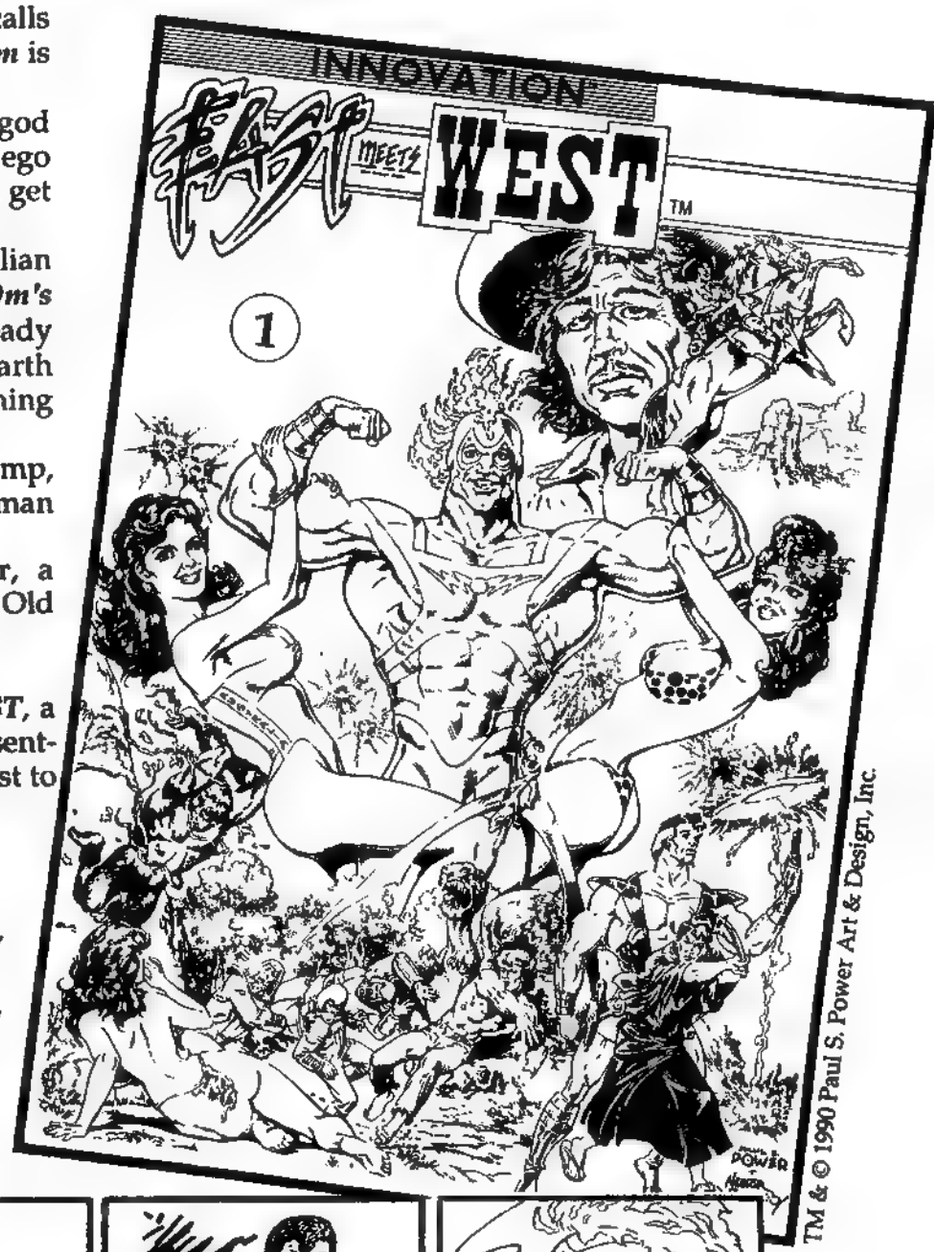

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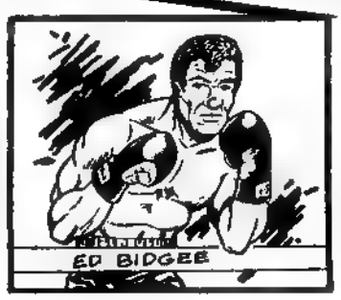


"The Turtles come across beautifully . . . I'm amazed."

Steven would tell me where to pull back, or say, "What you're doing is fine, in fact you could go farther." You really have to have a good dialogue between you and the director.

And I *hope* it's something that I've been born with, otherwise I may see this film and say, "Oop, no more comedy for me." There's a sort of timing thing that just organically happens. And it's like the casting director was saying to me, she's had some of the most brilliant actresses, who just would *slay* me when it comes to drama or something, come in and read these lines, and there's a sort of timing thing that doesn't happen.

I'm not sure that I *have* that timing thing. I've been told that I have, but I think I'm going to need to see the film before I can really say, "*Ah,* you're on to something here!" 'Cause you never know. You wake up in a cold sweat going, "Oh, my God, I'm ruining the mo-vie!" But you're really not, you're just being a paranoid actor — which is sort of normal and healthy. It makes you work hard.

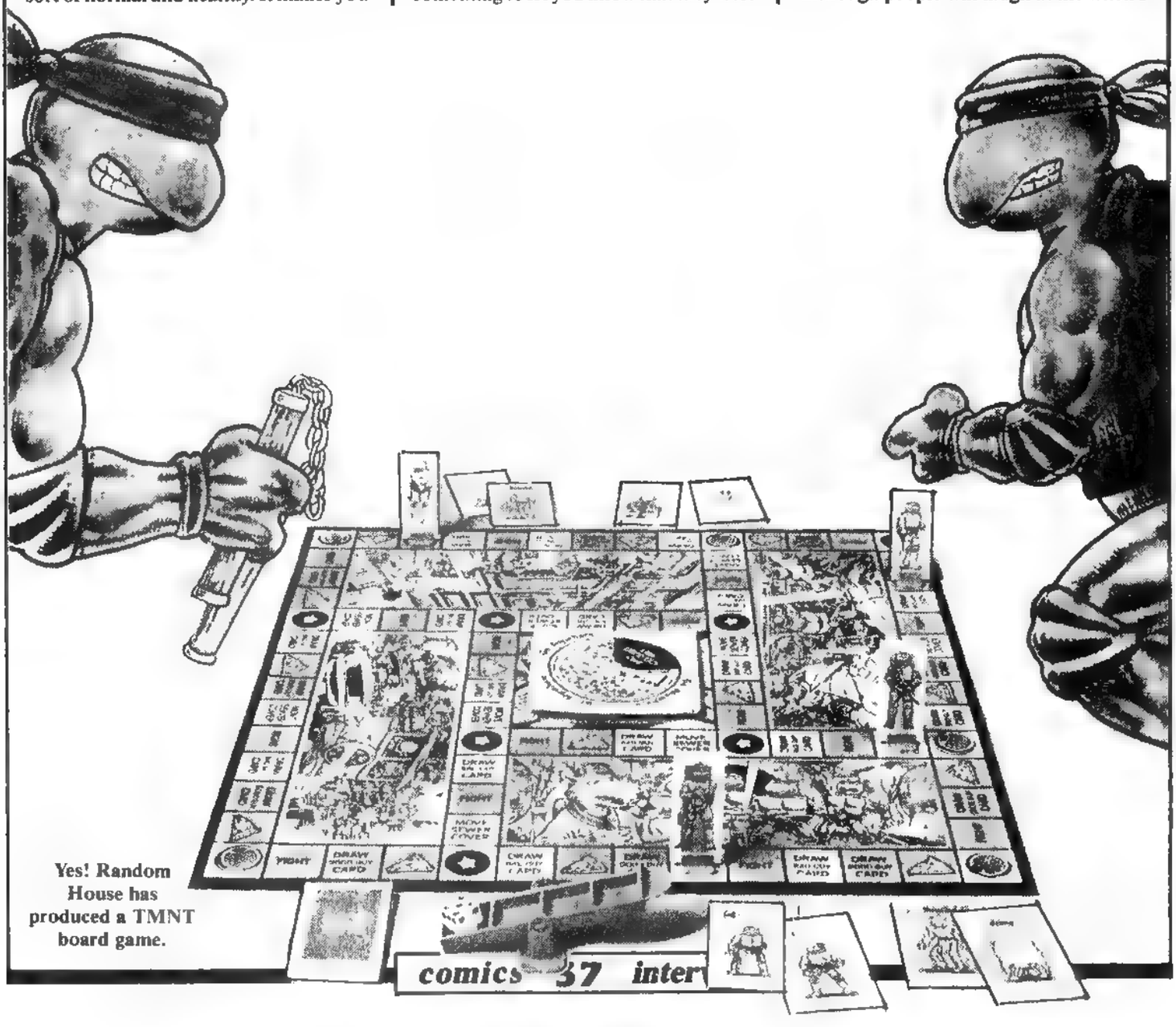
PAT: *Another — I guess this goes back to how the Turtle costumes looked and things — I've done amateur acting and I've always found that when I'm on stage with somebody that there's an awful lot that goes on in terms of eye contact and stuff. How do you act with someone when you don't* see *the eyes, they're behind something else?*

JUDITH: Yeah, that's a toughy. A lot of times you didn't even get the Turtle. When it's an action/adventure . . . one of the hardest things for Elias and I was that *because* they'd get so hot in there and need their air blown in and things, a lot of times they wouldn't bring the Turtles in when you had a close-up or something. There was a lot of make pretend, and there are times when you *need* something there. But when the Turtles were there they usually, they were set up in such a way that their eyes were looking at you, and they would *always* do something silly with their heads or their hands or something to let you know that they were with you. That really helped.

And a lot of it is just, you know, full on 100% make believe. It's like you're making believe more than you've ever had to make believe before. What was amazing to me was I would do scenes and think, "God, this just didn't work!" — and then look at dailies and say, "Wow, that really *worked!*" The Turtles come across *so* beautifully that . . . I'm just amazed. So, even just having them there, even if I couldn't see their eyes, in *this* case was better than not having them there at all.

PAT: *What are your interests other than acting?*

JUDITH: Well, one of my favorite things is just getting out of the city and going into the country and just hanging out, being quiet and being away from the hustle and the bustle and the pressure. One of the things that my husband and I are looking into is buying a house out in the country. And I think that would could *possibly* turn into a passion — although people will laugh at me when I



Yes! Random House has produced a TMNT board game.

"Geez, gosh. I have so many different interests."

say it — is I would love to just get out and do a garden. And hopefully in a couple of years start a family. I think between having a family and the house and all those kind of things which are just wonderfully *normal* — *(Laughter.)* You've got kids, though, so you would say, "No, it's *never* normal around here. *(Laughter.)* But trying to balance that with a career is a goal.

And day to day — geez, I love going to movies. I love just hanging out with my friends and cooking up amazing meals and sitting around eating until we can't even move anymore. *(Laughter.)* Gosh, I have so many different interests, but it's funny when someone asks you what you like to do. I love just sitting around with people and *not* talking about the business. When you're around actors so much, you know, everyone's "So, what are you doing?"

PAT: *"Are you working?"*

JUDITH: Exactly. Our friends are great. A lot of them are in the business, a lot of them aren't in the business, but there doesn't seem to be that. That might, like, take up the first ten minutes of conversation, but then we're off and onto the next thing. One of the things that Vince and I did — Vince is my husband — down in North Carolina this summer: we started boogie boarding, which was great. I had a house that was right on the ocean and we got these boogie boards and we were out every day

PAT: *What's a boogie board?*

JUDITH: A boogie board is *like* a surfboard only it's half the size, and you ride it. It's like a body board, you ride waves with it, and we had some *wonderful* waves. We turned into sort of HAWAII FIVE-0 this summer. *(Laughter.)* We're major surfer dudes — couldn't seem to ever boogie board without, like, talking like a surfer. It was a great summer.

LINDAHN & LINDAHN

CATALOG

Sean Lakey
Business Manager

Ron Lindahn and Val Lakey Lindahn work together to create images which fascinate and amuse, intrigue and delight. They are realists who bring glimpses of other worlds and possible futures into vivid focus. Ron and Val's work can be seen on many book and magazine covers, video packages, posters, games, and their art is featured in the 1990 Xanth Calendar. A number of their paintings have appeared in European publications as well.

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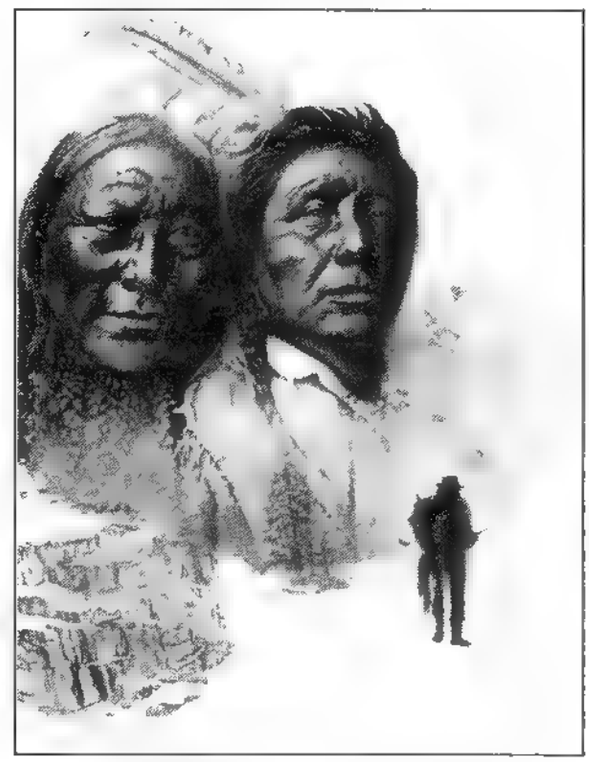

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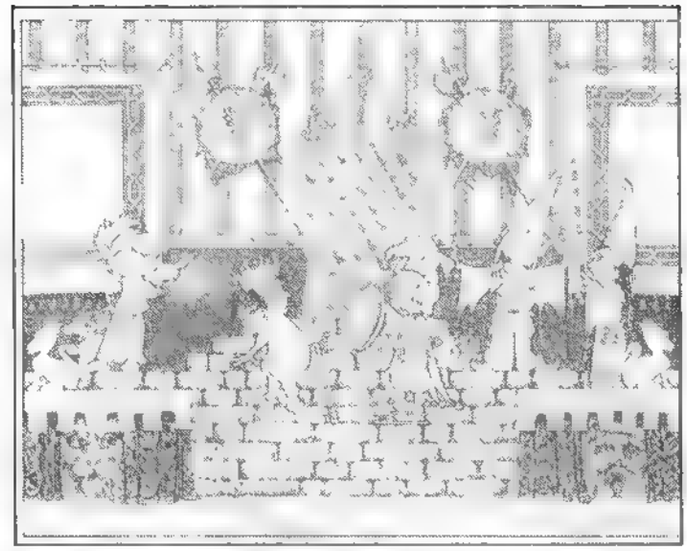

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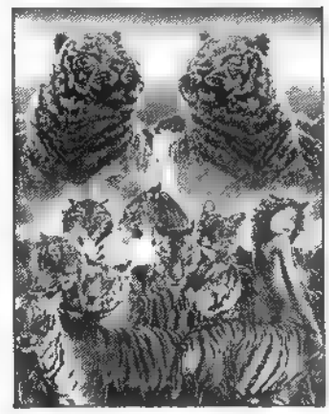

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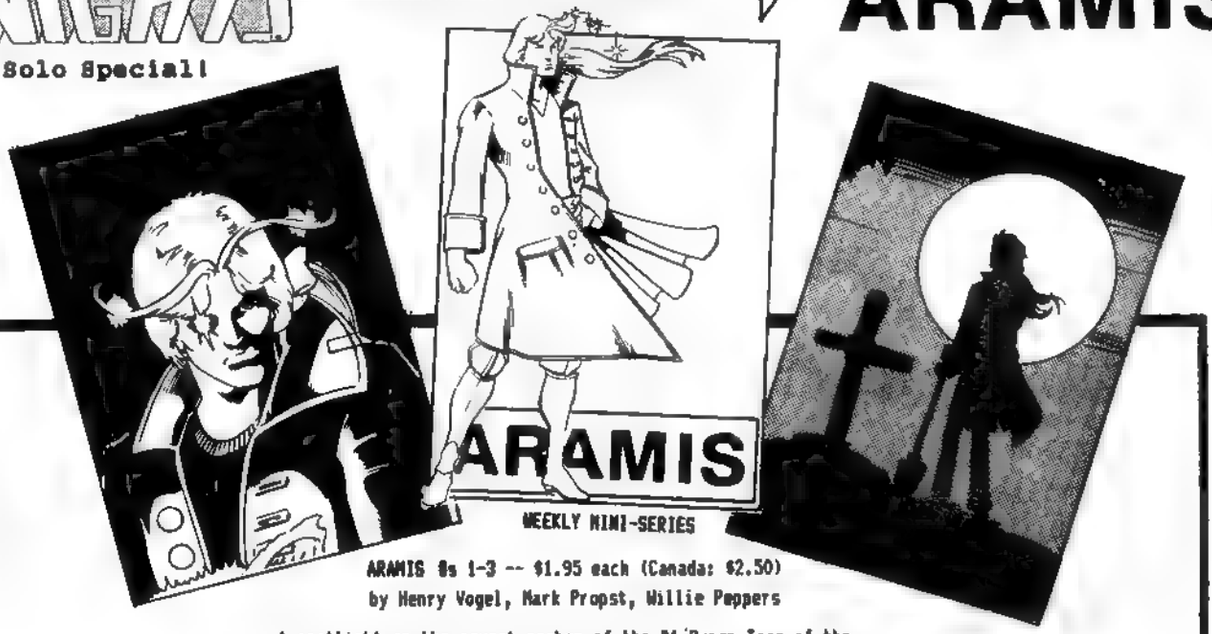

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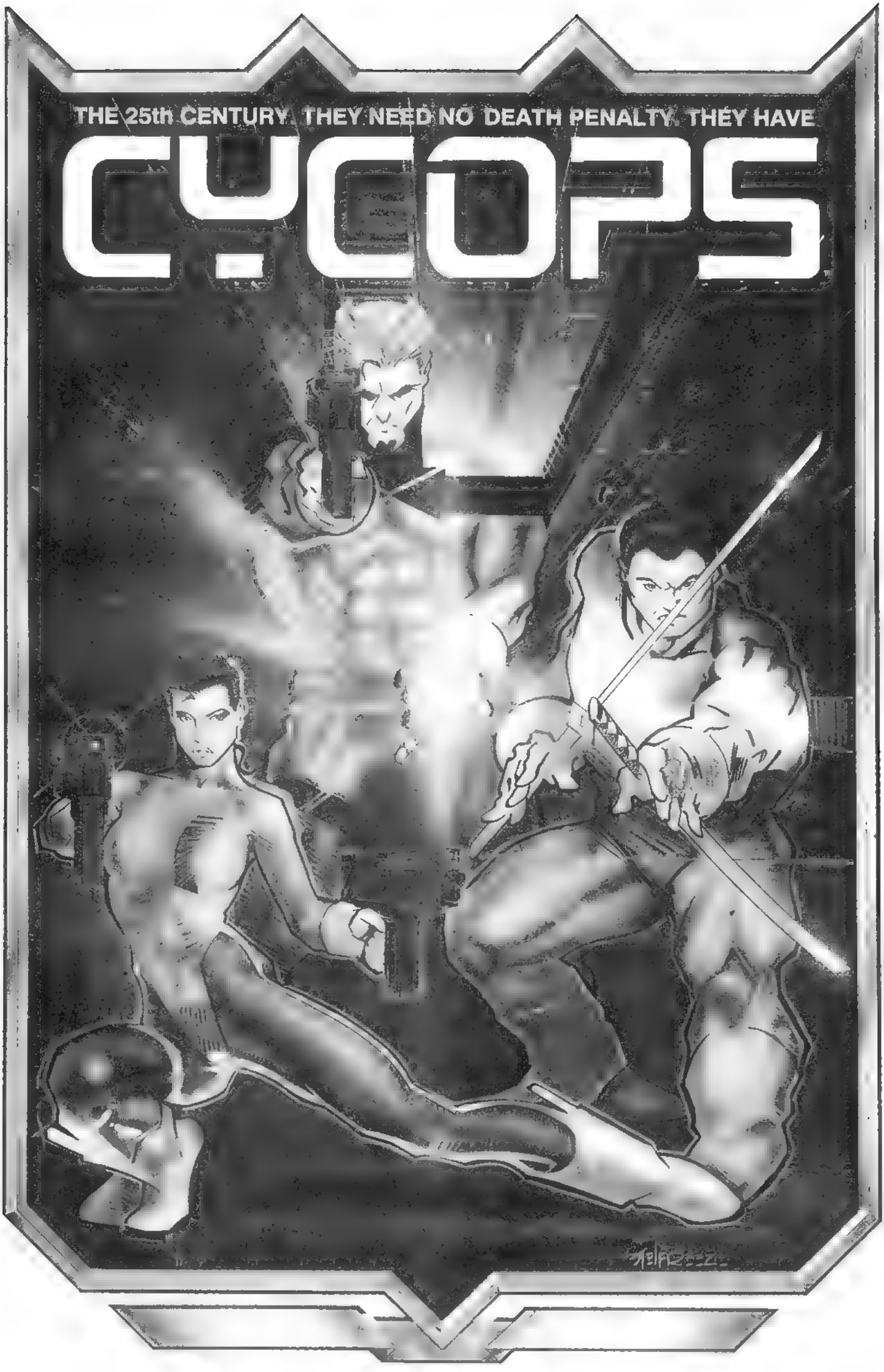
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"I'd never heard of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

STEVE BARRON

With his first feature film, ELECTRIC DREAMS, Steve Barron won the Madrid Film Festival's Best Director award, and the public prize for Best Film at the Avoriaz Fantastique Film Festival in Europe. He also directed the Emmy-winning pilot episode of STORYTELLER, "Hans My Hedgehog." And comics fans might want to pay attention to the credits of two films close to their hearts, for Steve Barron got his start as a camera assistant and worked on both SUPERMAN and SUPERMAN II. It's been a long road back to the funny pages . . .

Director, Steve Barron, on the set of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, the live-action movie from New Line Cinema.

Photo: Alan Markfield

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"This was an extremely intensive animatronics show."

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you first become involved with TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*

STEVE BARRON: I first became involved, really, when I was approached by Golden Harvest Films, which is financing the project. I had been talking about another film with them, and they had *this* property and they thought this would be ideal for us to do together. This was November of 1988, and I'd never actually heard — because I live in England — I'd never actually *heard* of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES before.

And they sent me a comic!

I read the comic, thought the ideas behind the characters were very interesting, and so we went from there. We developed a treatment based around *some* of the ideas in the comics, but based around a new story as well, and eventually came up with the screenplay. It happened quite quickly.

DARREL: *Why did you decide to go with TURTLES instead of this other project?*

STEVE: Well, the other film was in very early stages, this was something they wanted to do very quickly that they wanted to shoot in 1989. It had all the right kind of bits. I had a lot of freedom to create a story and a structure, getting involved in the early stages, and then working through what were basically *already* good design ideas.

It involved a *number* of things that were very interesting. I mean, I like working with fantasy creatures. I had done a project with **Jim Henson,** the TV series, and I just felt that *if* they were prepared to get involved with the right people, use the right people to create these creatures, like **Jim Henson,** then it would be a very interesting project to bring to the screen.

DARREL: *When I spoke with Tom Gray at Golden Harvest he mentioned that when you went to Henson that you gave him, in his words, "almost a wartime order." In other words, that you needed all of these technological capabilities developed for the Turtles, and ready to go by the time you wanted to shoot. And I was wondering what was it that you needed from Henson that had to be developed?*

STEVE: We had to basically come up with . . . I mean, a lot of animatronics is very easily done, but this was an extremely *intensive* animatronics *show.* The characters had to be mobile, agile, free to move around, and yet they had these large heads with large mouths and eyes that had to react and speak at the same speed as New York teenagers, really. They had to have that capability to interact at the rate of human characters, and that really had not been done before. There were a very few with *that* intensity in the medium, and in this film there were four of them running around all of the time.

So, we had to come up with some new technology. In fact, the quote from **Henson** was that on most shows we come up with *one* new technology, on this show we had to come up with *six.* And they had a very short time to do it. We had to keep our fingers crossed and hope that everything would work the way they should work, and they did.

DARREL: *They did?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Steve Barron
Born: 4 May 1956 — Dublin, Ireland
Occupation: Director
Credits: I've done about 120 rock videos over the years, of which some of the famous ones are Michael Jackson's BILLIE JEAN, Aha's TAKE ON ME, Dire Straits' MONEY FOR NOTHING, and then I've done David Bowie and ZZTop; then a movie called ELECTRIC DREAMS; and I worked on a television series called THE STORYTELLER with Jim Henson
Favorite Director: Orson Welles
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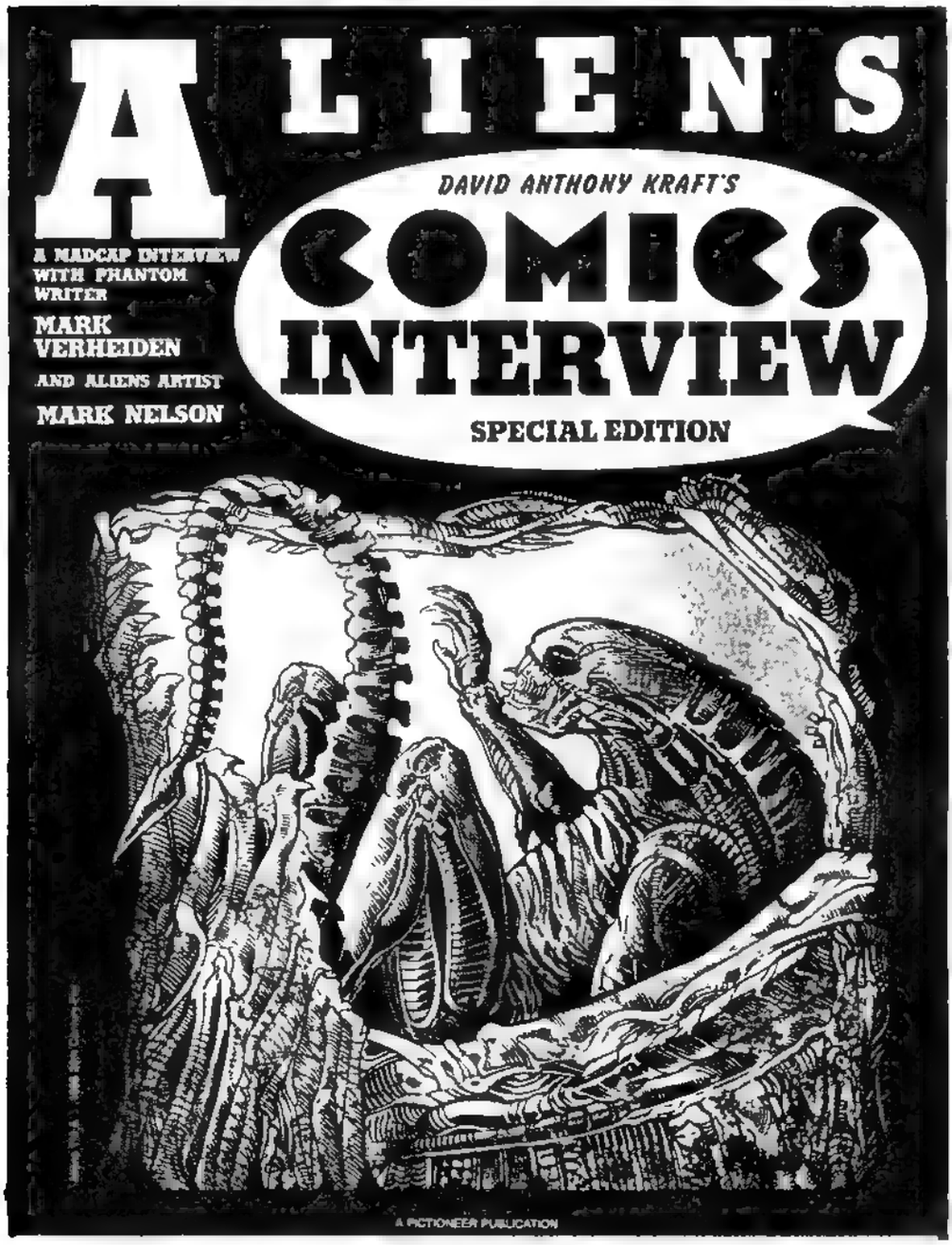

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"The back story of the Turtles is from the comics."

STEVE: Yeah, we got lucky.

DARREL: *You mentioned that the story is taken a lot from the comics. Anything specifically in that?*

STEVE: The back story of the Turtles is taken from the comics, the back story of how the Turtles came to be. The actual main story of the film is not, but the characters are, and certain specific scenes are taken In book #4 of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES they go to April's apartment and it's completely wrecked in a fight and then a fire, and then they run away to the country and recover, and there's a couple of scenes in the country as well. A lot of those things were what we really wanted, that sort of wonderful camaraderie. Casey and Donatello working on an old truck, fixing it and talking to each other, which we put directly in the film.

DARREL: *So, this won't be just straight action all the way through, you've got those moments like that?*

STEVE: Oh, yeah, a lot of moments like that

DARREL: *Now, I understand there were two screenwriters on this, Bobby Herbeck and Todd Langen.*

STEVE: That's right

DARREL: *Bobby Herbeck wrote the original treatment and first draft, then Todd Langen took over and wrote the final draft, and I was wondering what the differences between the two scripts was, what Bobby Herbeck developed and what Todd Langen added to it?*

STEVE: Well, the basic difference was — I mean, we *developed* the structure with Bobby, then the *focus* was much stronger with Todd, more grown-up. Bobby had some very funny stuff and introduced the threads, Todd brought more coherence to the material.

DARREL: *I've got some production notes here that I've been going through, and before you actually got to shooting you put this crew together. What I want to do is just go through the list of names here and have you comment on who these people are and what their involvement with TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES is, and why they were chosen for this film.*

STEVE: Okay.

DARREL: *Graham Cottle.*

STEVE: **Graham Cottle** was the line producer. We've known Graham for a number of years, **Simon Fields** and I, and we chose him because we knew his knowledge of production was very strong.

DARREL: *John Fenner.*

STEVE: **John Fenner** is a cameraman, the director of photography. I think he's one of the best in the world. He's never done a feature before, but he's been asked to do quite a few. He did a TV series with me, THE STORYTELLER, and I've done a number of rock videos with him, and his artistic *taste* in lighting and texture was always so coherent with the material.

DARREL: *Roy Forge Smith.*

STEVE: **Roy Forge Smith** is the production designer. He was somebody that we — well, I've never worked with him

"A lot of things are going to seem very

before, but at one stage we were going to shoot the film in London and so we got together to talk to him. And I really like his work, especially with **Terry Gilliam.** I loved the movie JABBERWOCKY, I loved the design, and THE HOLY GRAIL. And he brought strong *texture* to the film, like the walls of the sewers and out in the country. He's very good at creating a good good look.

DARREL: *Both John Fenner and Roy Forge Smith have a lot to do with how the film is going to look on the screen, and I'm wondering how close an approximation that's going to be to the comics.*

STEVE: To the *original* comics that **Eastman** and **Laird** did it's going to be pretty close. A lot of things are going to seem very familiar to the readers of the comic, a large number of things.

DARREL: *And I read in the production notes where Roy Forge Smith and the art director, Gary Wissner, went to New York and really did a lot of research for the sets and everything.*

STEVE: Yes.

DARREL: *Tried to go down in the sewers even.*

STEVE: Yeah, yeah. And — well, you can kind of guess it — but real sewers can be pretty boring. *(Laughter.)* A lot of them are just concrete tubes, and we wanted to come with more of a baroque . . .more London Victorian sewers than New York. You sort of feel they've been there through the years; they're built of brick and they've got corners and so on. They feel very real.

DARREL: *Sally Menke.*

STEVE: Sally Menke is the editor. She's somebody, again, whom I hadn't worked with, but she's one of the people I interviewed for this film. She was recommended by **Doug Cole,** who worked with her on a number of things, and she's also done short films — this, again, was her first feature. But from reading the script she had a great sensibility towards it, and I thought that was important.

It was interesting, also, that she had a lot more *sensitivity,* from a woman essentially, for the characters, and for April O'Neil. I wanted that sensitivity, I wanted her to be the sort of girl that girls like. Often — I mean, I want the boys to like her as well — but do you know what I mean? I don't want to alienate the girls, I want to have them sit in the cinema and like April.

DARREL: *Unlike Kim Bassinger who seems to be perceived as a threat a lot of the time by the women in the audience.*

STEVE: Yes, and a *lot* of that comes in the cutting. It is a tremendous choice *always* which performance to take. You can really change the whole perception of a character in the editing stage using different setups, different takes.

DARREL: *John M. Hay.*

STEVE: John Hay, costume designer. I've never worked with him before but I've liked what I saw of the things that he'd done, like QUEST FOR FIRE Again, it was texture, I wanted the costumes so you didn't feel like someone had designed them. And **John Hay** has done some things that are slightly unusual, and he's also New York based and the film is New York based.

DARREL: *And John Hay was costume designer on POPEYE as well?*

STEVE: That's right.

DARREL: *His costumes in that film were really amazing, came very close to the old Segar strips. Hopefully, he's done the same thing for TURTLES?*

STEVE: Yes.

DARREL: *Great. Next we have Brian Henson.*

STEVE: Brian Henson, Jim Henson's son, is a young guy, 25 years old, and he is very bright and a *superb* puppeteer, one of the best there is. He's very good, and he was puppet supervisor on the film, in fact he was responsible for the building of the puppets in the Creature Shop And I decided that we needed somebody on the second unit that could deal with the performances of the Turtles, and so he had the opportunity to direct, worked the second unit. He did a great job.

DARREL: *Now, it said in the notes that the film was storyboarded, but it didn't say who had worked on the storyboards. Can you give us that information?*

STEVE: Yeah, sure. In fact, the guy who worked the storyboards was wonderful and he's a comic-book artist himself, **Brendan McCarthy.** He's done some of the JUDGE DREDD, A.D. 2000 stuff,

The creators of the TMNT (Peter Laird & Kevin Eastman) see their comic book heroes come to life.

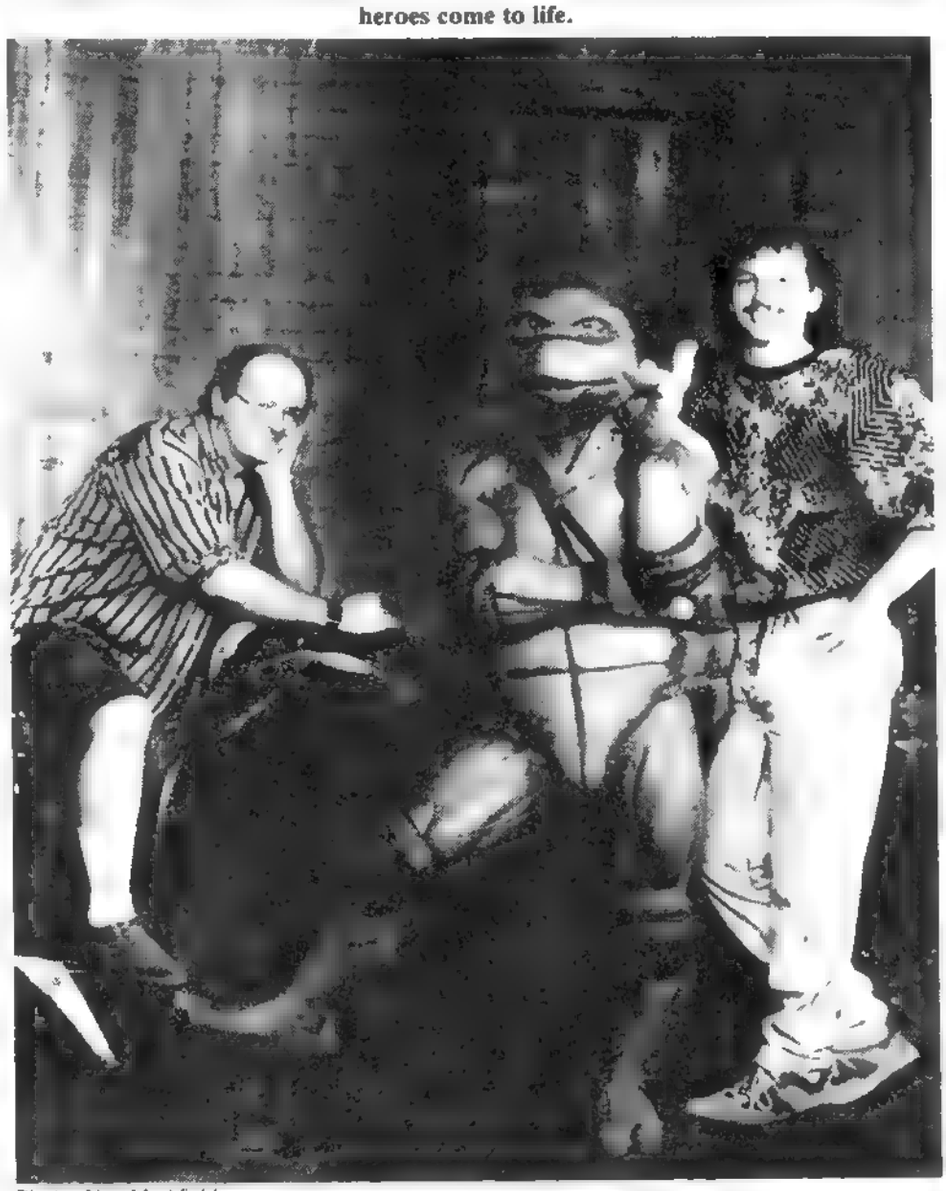

Photo: Alan Markfield

familiar to the readers of the comic book."

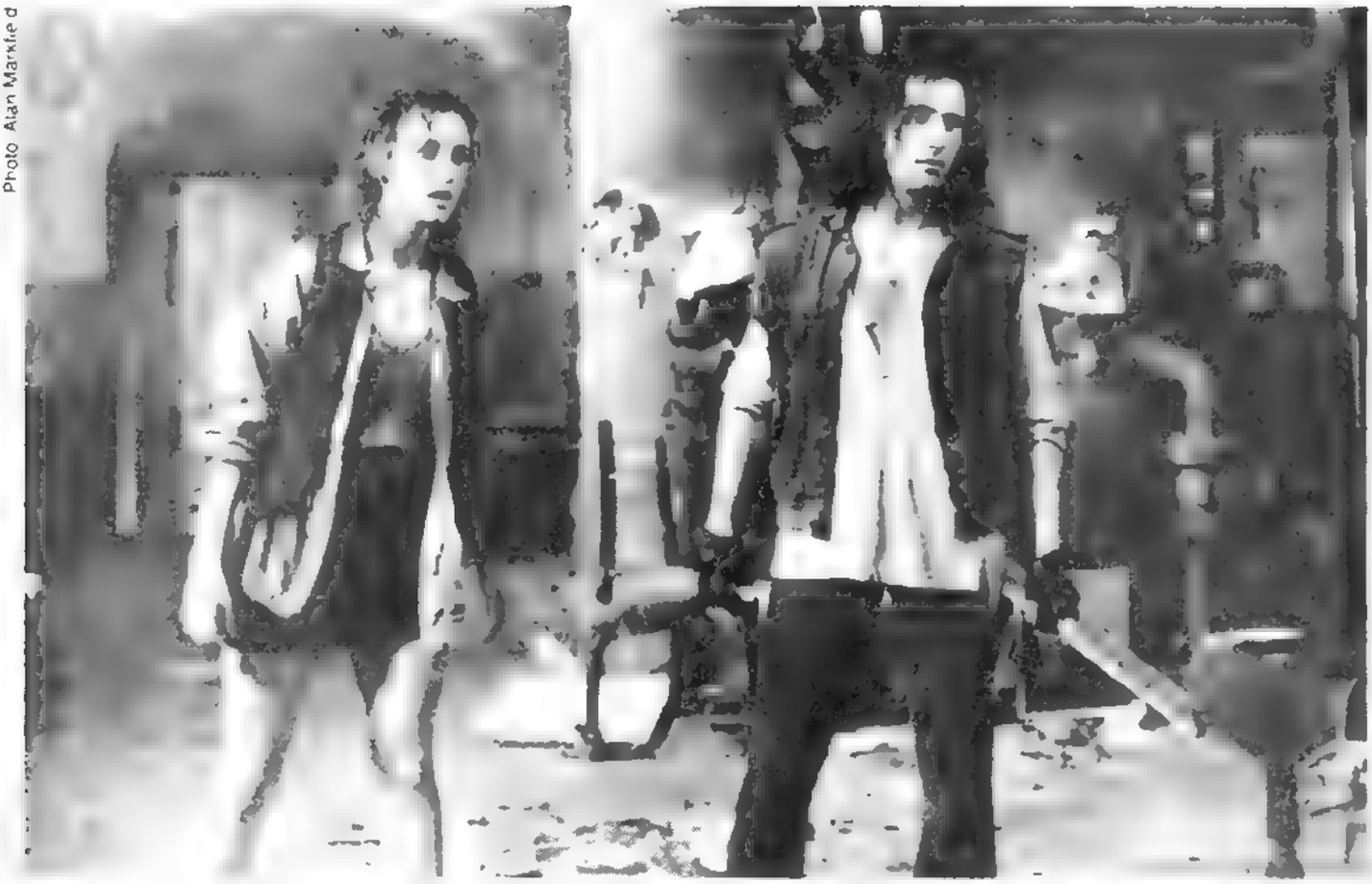

Photo Alan Markfield

April O'Neil (Judith Hoag) and Casey Jones (Elias Koteas) discover that the evil Foot Clan has ransacked the Turtles' sewer home.

and . . . what else did he do? He's done a comic called PARADAX.

DARREL: *Oh, yeah, I remember that one, from Vortex.*

STEVE: Yes. He's got *brilliant* ideas and I've worked with him for the last five years on a number of things

DARREL: *Now, the storyboard artist is almost like the director of the film before the film is made — you know, they set up how things would be shot, at least the way they see it. How involved were you in the creation of the storyboards?*

STEVE: Frame by frame. And they look wonderful, Brendan is wonderful. We did have another storyboard artist do things, but it was only because there wasn't enough time; Brendan was the main one.

DARREL: *Next, I want to get into the cast. Casting, of course, is one of the most important things in any film.*

STEVE: Yes.

DARREL: *So, I'll just go down the list and have you comment why these people were chosen and what they bring to the roles they play. First, Judith Hoag as April O'Neil*

STEVE: Yes. Judith really — we saw a *lot* of people for the role of April O'Neil and what she brought was a strong character and a good sense of wit. She could be hard; her character is a very independent career girl. I also like the way she could be very unselfconscious about herself. She's not one of these . . . she didn't care how she had to look, and I think that has a great deal to do with her presence on the screen. She was wonderful.

DARREL: *Elias Koteas as Casey Jones.*

STEVE: Elias is currently being hailed as a young *Robert DeNiro*. He's now done about ten movies, supporting roles, and I would be prepared to bet a fair amount of money that he's going to be a major star. And Casey is a great, *interesting* character, almost like a **Harrison Ford** of STAR WARS character who comes in, who you don't know much about but you like, who is like a roving pirate who becomes a good guy. But he's really quite insecure, and quite intense sometimes.

DARREL: *You mean Casey's insecure, not Elias?*

STEVE: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *James Saito as the Shredder.*

STEVE: James has got the most menacing *eyes* on Earth, and that's why we had to go with him, really. He really has that look of *evil.*

DARREL: *And the Shredder is the embodiment of evil.*

STEVE: Exactly.

DARREL: *Michael Turney as Danny Pennington.*

STEVE: Yeah, Michael is one of the kids who didn't look like all of the other kids; he's got a very unusual look, that framed pale kind of face. He's only fourteen years old but he's a very good actor. He underplays it when a lot of kids would overdo it.

DARREL: *He doesn't roll his eyeballs every two seconds like most Hollywood kids.*

STEVE: Exactly. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Raymond Serra as Ross Sterns, the police chief.*

STEVE: **Raymond Serra** as the police chief. What appealed to me about him was that the character has to be — and he's not a villain or anything — but he has to be, like, what good is he. I felt Raymond would fit into the role of a slightly dim but extremely opinionated chief with a very Catholic feel.

DARREL: *Jay Patterson as April's boss, Charles Pennington.*

STEVE: Jay, a very accomplished actor. I liked his disposition, really. I thought the way he carried himself through the part was a little bohemian, a slightly

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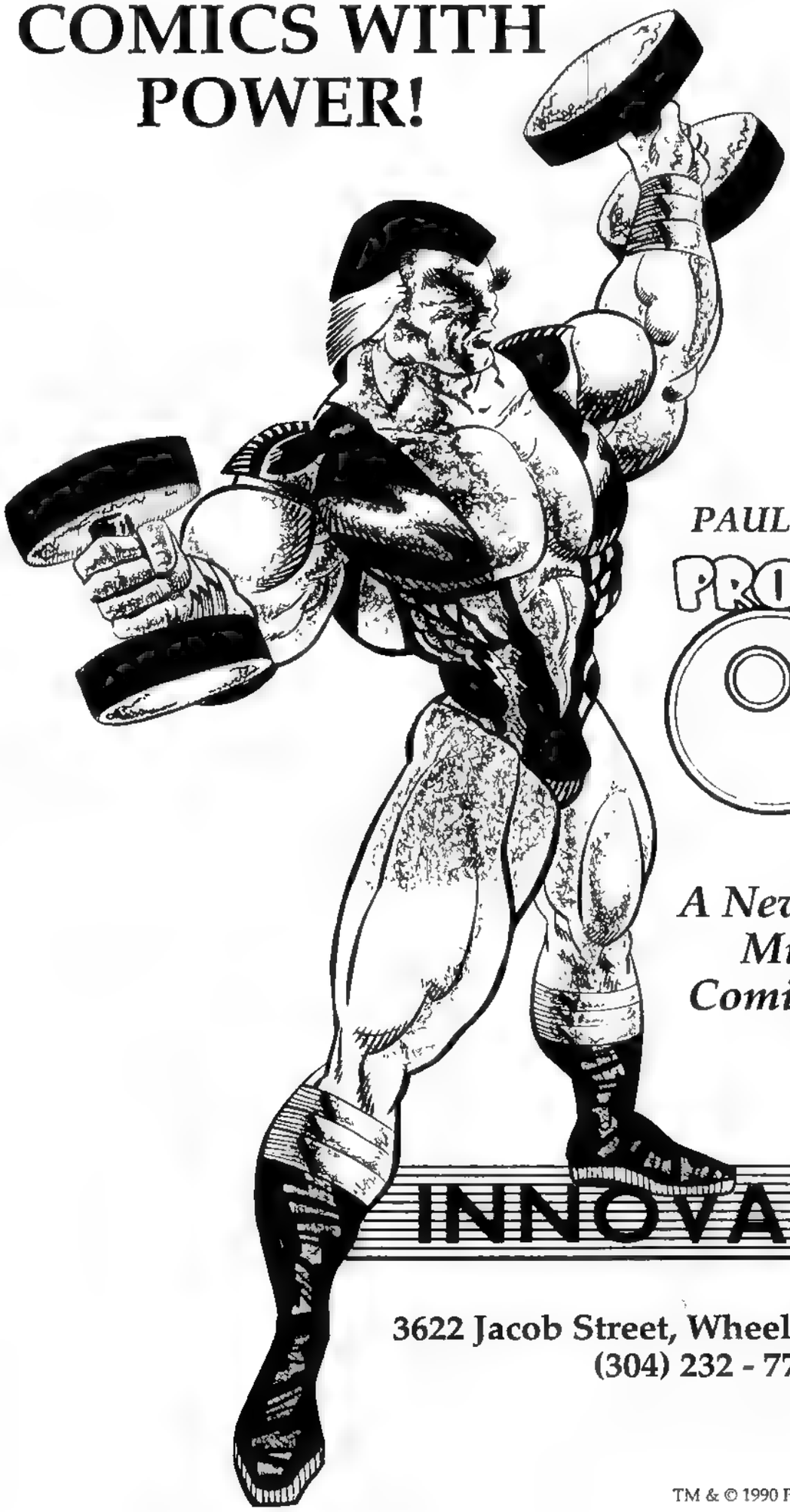

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"We were fearful of a massive cost overrun."

Photo: Alan Markfield

Tatsu (Toshishiro Obata) and his Foot Clan prepare to wage a destructive attack on the innocent Gotham populace.

unusual move, but he would pull up to a level which recommends . . . getting someone on the way to believing in the Turtles.

DARREL: *Toshishiro Obata as Tatsu.*

STEVE: Obata was one of the baddies in BLACK RAIN, and he is the Shredder's lieutenant. He had a few fight scenes and he would throw punches and kicks, and what's incredible is that he is *so* fast, so incredibly quick, that sometimes his fist would come into frame and it would only be in there for one frame, 1/24th of a second.

DARREL: *Oh, my gosh. That is fast. That's so fast you would miss it watching the film.*

STEVE: Well, that was the problem on a few takes.

DARREL: *Whew. And, of course, I have no cast listed for Raphael, Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Donatello, or Master Splinter.*

STEVE: Right, that's because those, of course, are the puppets and so on. What we're trying to do is keep up the fantasy there, and not talk too much about the workings of these characters, especially before the film.

DARREL: *I read somewhere that there were plans to cast actual martial arts experts as the Turtles.*

STEVE: Well, yes, they were as *part,* in the fights and that sort of thing — but they weren't throughout.

DARREL: *And you chose the North Carolina Film Studios. Is there any special reason you chose to film there?*

STEVE: Well, a lot of it was cost. We wanted to shoot in as short a time in New York as possible, because we were fearful of a massive cost overrun. And shooting on location there is *very* impractical *and* very expensive. Especially shooting at night —

And the other reason was that there was already an existing New York street on the backlot, it was built for YEAR OF THE DRAGON. So we had a street where we could shoot at night these scenes involving manholes and things like that, and we were able to very much control it. That was why we ended up filming most of the movie in North Carolina.

DARREL: *How did the filming go?*

STEVE: It went very well.

DARREL: *No problems?*

STEVE: Problems by the hour. *(Laughter.)* But that's normal. We kind of had a closed set. The danger was that there was a lot of technological stuff about. And we didn't want anyone shooting pictures of our Turtles

DARREL: *Now, everyone I've spoken with just raves about the Turtles, how lovable they are and so on — it's almost like they're going to change the old adage to "Never act with children, animals, or animatronics."*

STEVE: Yes.

DARREL: *But it's all on an emotional level. What I find myself wondering is is this mainly an emotional level film or is there something else in it as well, some type of social commentary or intellectual statement?*

STEVE: There is a small morality kind of social level comment going on, but it's not a revelation or challenge or . . .

DARREL: *More a reassurance type of thing?*

STEVE: Yes, it's a reassurance thing — it's good against evil.

But the film, you're right, from the very beginning we knew that the way this film was going to work was emotionally. And we knew that the way to make it work emotionally was to make those characters emotionally attractive — that was the main, number one thing to do. And the people who have seen it have all said that's what we achieved.

"We set about making models and animatronics

SIMON FIELDS

Limelight Productions, formed by Simon Fields and Steve Barron, respectively producer and director of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, is known as a "hothouse for stars, directors, designers and technicians." From music videos to television commercials to feature films, Simon Fields' deft award-winning touch has become something of a trademark as well as a high standard to which others aspire. So, it should come as no surprise that he is a very busy man. Fortunately, he managed to spare a little time for COMICS INTERVIEW and the brief chat which follows . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *You are producing the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES movie?*

SIMON FIELDS: Yes!

DARREL: *And I understand that filming has been completed?*

SIMON: Yes.

DARREL: *What does a producer do?*

SIMON: Oh, my God. *(Laughter.)* I can't answer that, it's "How long is a piece of string?" Different producers do different things.

DARREL: *I notice there are three producers and one co-producer listed.*

SIMON: **David Chan** works at Golden Harvest, so he came on more as a supervisor, I suppose, looking after Golden Harvest's money. **Kim Dawson** didn't produce, he just brought the rights in to **Tom Gray**. And I'm the other producer.

DARREL: *And Graham Cottle?*

SIMON: **Graham Cottle** is a line producer.

DARREL: *Well, let's start at the beginning then, how did you first become involved with the film?*

SIMON: Golden Harvest Communications, who are financiers of the film, approached **Steven Barron**, my partner, as director. They said that they had the rights to this comic. Steven and myself *read* the comic, but we didn't get it, to begin with. After we started to poke our noses into how big the phenomenon was, we took a second look, and we saw a lot *more* inside the comic. Then from that point on **Tom Gray** from Golden Harvest came to us and asked Limelight to produce.

We then took meetings in Northamp-

"What do you mean, 'No Turtles Allowed?"

Photo. Alan Markfield

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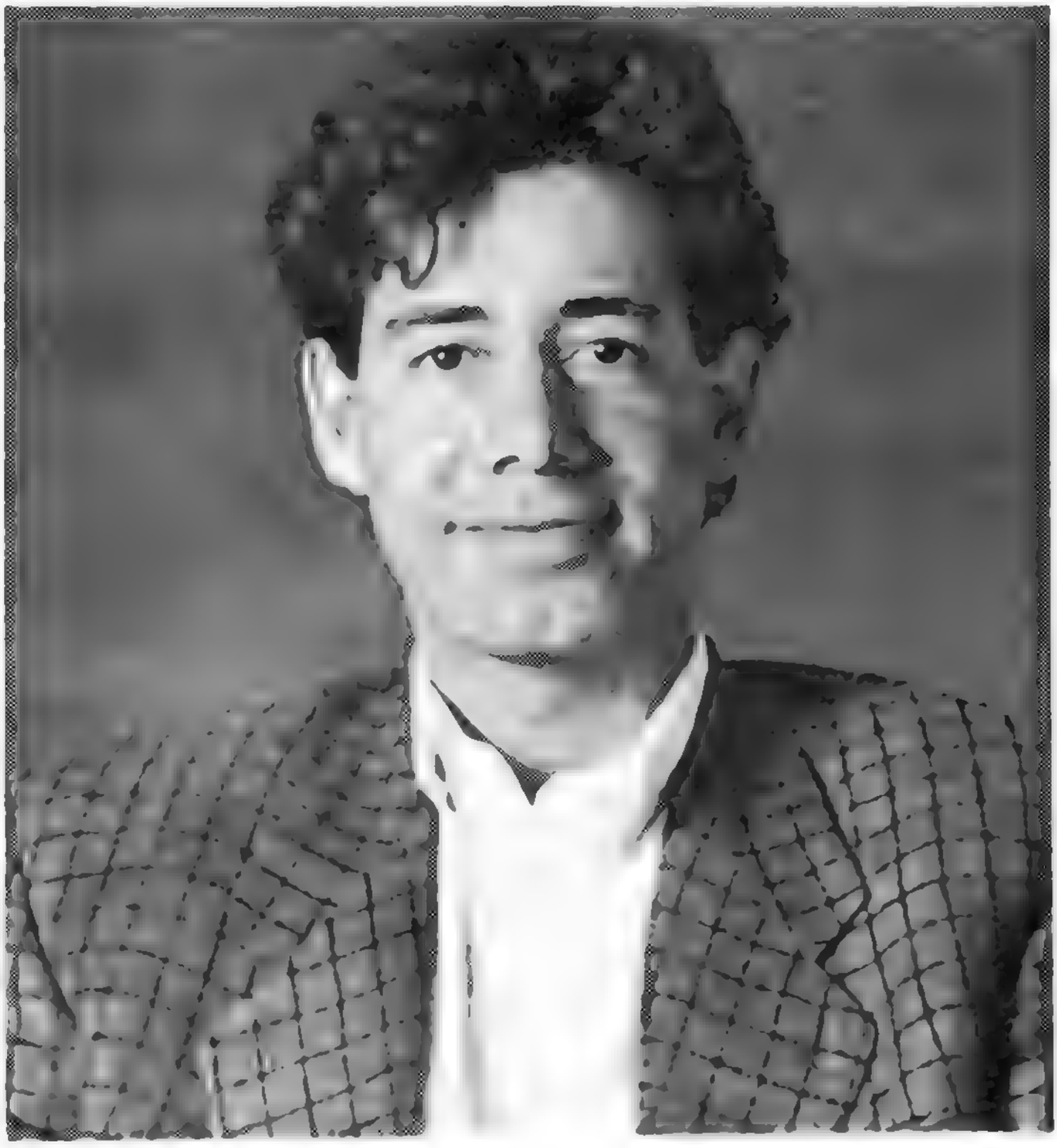
until we came up with a system we could cope with."



ton with **Eastman** and **Laird**, who are the originators and the artists who created TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, and we started to discuss the whole project. A screenplay was commissioned, and we employed **Todd Langen**, who then adapted what was a mediocre treatment into a *great* script And from then **Tom Gray**, Golden Harvest, gave us the go-ahead; and we sold the film to New Line Communications, and we started to make the film We started to preproduce the film.

It was decided by Steven that we should use **Jim Henson** who would make the Turtles for us. So, we laboriously set about having them make models and maquettes and animatronics until we came up with a system that we felt we could *cope* with. And we decided on North Carolina as the location, and we set off down there to make it. We took two-and-a-half months to make the film. We filmed there and in New York. And when we returned we started the assembly, and we're just starting the director's cut right now.

DARREL: *When I spoke with Tom Gray he said that the original idea was to do a cheap thing in Hong Kong. Were you involved at that stage?*

SIMON: Well, we weren't going to do it. He asked us to do it, but we said . . . we got involved, it got done differently.

DARREL: *You said you didn't "get" the comic when you first read it. What were your first impressions of the comic?*

SIMON: *Very* strange! *(Laughter.)* I didn't understand what a Turtle was, what they were doing. Once I read more into the comic, and heard the back story, where they came from and how they

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"The Turtles are the stars of the film themselves."

Photo Available

Casey Jones (Elias Koteas) is joined by Splinter and the reformed Danny Pennington (Michael Turney) in his efforts to save New York.

practiced the art of ninjitsu, then I understood. Then it was *funny*. I saw the strangeness of it all.

DARREL: *What was it about the series that convinced you to make the film? Was it mainly the phenomenon surrounding it?*

SIMON: I loved the whole idea of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DARREL: *And what would that idea be, in your opinion?*

SIMON: Four half-human, half turtle teenagers fighting crime in New York.

DARREL: *You hired the Henson group, and I understand that they came up with some really spectacular Turtles.*

SIMON: They are amazing.

DARREL: *What can you tell us about them?*

SIMON: Well, a normal film like this would have taken three times as much money to make, but **Henson's** invented a special method of puppeteering that involved infrared sensors whereby the puppeteers through *hand* controls and through *mouth* sensors could operate the Turtle's mouths and movements. Otherwise, it would have taken eight times as many people.

DARREL: *So, you can have one person just control everything?*

SIMON: Yes, absolutely.

DARREL: *That would probably free you up for a lot of things.*

SIMON: Well, no . . . it was one of the reasons that we were able to make the film for the money, rather than spending $30 million that it should have been. *(Laughter).*

DARREL: *What kind of things can these Turtles do that they might not have been able to do before?*

SIMON: Well, we would never have wanted them to do any *less*, it's just that we were able to do that for less money, is all. Without the special animatronics we would never have been able to make the film

DARREL: *I have some production notes here and I noticed that there was no listing for any actors on the Turtles at all.*

SIMON: That's right, that's the way we're keeping it

DARREL: *Why is that?*

SIMON: Just because the Turtles are the stars themselves, we didn't want anything to come in the way of making these Turtles believable for kids.

DARREL: *Well, they kind of tried the same thing with HOWARD THE DUCK but it didn't work.*

SIMON: Yeah, well, HOWARD THE DUCK was a stupid story. It's a stupid script. Not only was HOWARD THE DUCK a stupid *script*, but he was an unsympathetic character who had no particularly idiosyncratic charm. It was a duck who spoke unpleasantries to people. These Turtles you've got to see to believe, they're *wonderful* They all have *wonderful* characters. They're teenagers, they're lovable, they're beautiful; fantastic.

DARREL: *How close do they come to the comic's characters?*

SIMON: We think that they are a live action — in other words a *"real"* — version of what you would expect from a cartoon. They don't follow *exactly* what the Turtles look like in the cartoon, but then cartoons take various licenses.

DARREL: *I've got a little bit here about the story, it involves April and Casey and the Shredder. Is this story taken from any of the comics per se?*

SIMON: Yes. It takes about 50 percent of the stories in the comic, ideas from all over the comic-book series, and melds them into one coherent story.

DARREL: *Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

SIMON: Yeah. **Malcolm McLaren** is going to be supervising the album, and it's going to be on Virgin Records and Tapes, and it's going to be *wild*

DARREL: *Anything like the Elfman BATMAN stuff?*

SIMON: No, much better.

DARREL: *From what I've read it seems like you've got a good 100-to-120-minute film in the works here.*

SIMON: That's right

DARREL: *Is it going to be about that length?*

SIMON: Yes, it will be.

DARREL: *And this is going to be a major release?*

SIMON: On 1,000 cinemas from New Line Cinema!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Simon Fields
Born: 4 October 1955 — London
Occupation: Film Producer and President of Limelight
Credits: Producer of Prince's SIGN OF THE TIMES (Limelight's first feature film); of Madonna's MATERIAL GIRL: of Michael Jackson's BILLIE JEAN, of Madonna's LIKE A VIRGIN - I've produced *thousands* of video clips
Training: I went to school in England, just normal training — no university Then I became a "runner," like a "gopher," in a film production company, and worked my way up through production, through location finding, then to production managing, and then to producing.
Favorite Comic Book: MAD

"I said, 'There's no way I want to do a movie called

TOM GRAY

On the wakes of WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT (1988) and BATMAN (1989), many people have been wondering what property Hollywood will borrow next from the comics media to turn into a cinematic megahit. Of course WATCHMAN, if they ever stop dragging their feet, is the sure bet in fan circles, and a few of our — to put it nicely — more lascivious types can barely contain themselves at the thought of a big screen BLACK KISS.

But even as BATMAN hit the theaters, even as ROGER RABBIT hit the video stores, TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, a live-action silver screen extravaganza, was in production! So, faster than you can say "Soon To Be A Major Motion Picture!" let's take a peek behind the scenes and meet the man who made it possible . . .

Michaelangelo comforts a tot visiting the set.

Photo. Alan Markfield

DARREL L. BOATZ: *As I understand it, you are the executive producer of the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES movie —*

TOM GRAY: More correctly, I am the executive in charge of the production.

DARREL: *And you are the person who was instrumental in getting this film going?*

TOM: Yes.

DARREL: *How did you discover the Turtles?*

TOM: I'll give you the chronological order. There is a comedian named **Gallagher**, do you know who he is?

DARREL: *The guy with the sledgehammer.*

TOM: The Sledgomatic, right. His manager, a guy named **Gary Propper**, was the originator of the idea. He started following the TURTLES on his tours with **Gallagher**, and thought it would make a wonderful movie. He got together with **Kim Dawson**, who is currently a production executive with Walt Disney, and went back and talked to **Mark Freedman**, who is somewhat the boy wonder behind taking **Eastman** and **Laird's** initial ideas and then getting them merchandised through something called Surge Licensing. Both **Propper** and **Dawson** got together with **Mark Freedman** and **Eastman** and **Laird** and said that they would like to set up a movie and get this thing made. I'm not quite sure, actually, how far they went with it and everything, other than they had a few ideas that they kicked around — it didn't go too far.

They brought it to a writer named **Bobby Herbeck**, who had just finished writing a screenplay for me called DEPARTMENT STORE, and Bobby said, "Hey, Tom, you ought to take a look at this project." I *dismissed* it. I said,

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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES!""

"Barron's demo changed my perspective."

Photo Alan Markfield

The crime-fighting, wisecracking heroes in a half shell (Raphael, Leonardo, Michaelangelo and Donatello) rescue their aging ninja master, a rat named Splinter.

"Bobby, please, I'm making some other films, I don't want to know about it." So he said, "Well, why don't you have a meeting with **Kim Dawson**." "Bob, why? There's no way I want to do a movie called TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES!" *(Laughter.)* And he kept persisting, so finally I had a lunch meeting with Bobby and Kim. We discussed it, and *frankly* I just said, "Guys, forget it, I don't want to do this."

They gave me the comic book — at the end of this lunch, I was literally sliding out of my seat to go back to the office. I thumbed through it and said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I could do this! I could make this movie in Hong Kong, knock it off for a very nominal price, and we could make our money back in overseas sales." So, that was the start of the project. I then submitted it to **Raymond Chow** in Hong Kong, and I think I started off by saying in my letter, "You may think I'm crazy but I think this thing just may make a pretty good film. If it does then this letter will be framed." *(Laughter.)* I sent some stuff out, sent the comic books, and he really thought it would work, just on the fact that we could do it in the low budget range and we could do it out in Hong Kong. So, that's how we got involved in it. Then we started getting *excited* about it!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tom Gray
Born: 1945 — New York City
Residence: Seattle, WA
Occupation: Senior Vice President of Production, Golden Harvest Films. I've been in this position for five years.
Credits: The most current one is A SHOW OF FORCE.
Favorite Turtle: All Four

After that, quite by chance, I was involved in a picture at that time with **Roland Jaffe**, and we were looking at English directors because we wanted to have an English director on the picture, and I came across **Steve Barron's** name, who I hadn't heard of. I was sent his demo, and what I saw in there changed *completely* my whole perspective of the picture. He'd only done one feature, ELECTRIC DREAMS, which had won a lot of *critical* support but didn't do much commercially. But more *importantly*, I saw this guy's award-winning videos with **ZZTop, Michael Jackson, Dire Straits.** He was at the top of his game as far as being a music video director, and I felt that that was the *perfect* kind of person to do TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

So, I had a meeting with him, I liked him very much, and he was very enthusiastic about this. And he asked **me** if I had a producer, because he works with his partner, named **Simon Fields,** in their production company, Limelight. I said, "Well, I have a producer, **David Chan,** who is an in-house producer for us, and I also have **Kim Dawson,** but let me have a meeting with Simon." I met with Simon, I liked him very much, we shared a lot of the same feeling about this project, so we made a deal to hire Steve *and* Simon,

"The picture will end up costing around $12 million."

Steve as the director and Simon as one of the three producers. Then *they* came up with the idea, "Why don't we go to **Jim Henson**, get **Jim Henson** to make all of these Turtles! And I said, "Well, that would be an interesting way to do it — it would be outrageously expensive." Well, Steve had worked with **Jim Henson** and knew everybody and felt that we could get this thing really right.

That's when the picture started to go away from a nominal $1.5 to $2 million picture; it will end up costing around the $12 million mark. When you go with the best you *get* the best, but it costs more money. So, that became a go. **Bobby Herbeck** wrote the first draft of the screenplay, which had to receive both **Eastman** and **Laird's** approval because they wanted to make sure that this didn't deviate too far from their characters. These are *their* creations and we're very sensitive to their feelings about them, because we didn't want to undo what they had already started. So, we wrote a treatment, they approved the treatment, and we went to a first draft screenplay with **Bobby Herbeck**.

Then, after Bobby turned in his first draft, we felt that he had done a very good job laying out a beginning, a middle and an end, but we wanted to bring in another writer who would more-or-less punch up the dialogue and take over for Bobby. Now, that's generally done in comedy because in comedy it's very hard to get it right — because who do you tell your jokes to? So, with another writer coming on using Bobby's work as a base, being able to see the ups and downs of the screenplay, he put it in perspective. And that writer is named **Todd Langen**, who went on to be nominated for an Emmy for writing one of the episodes of THE WONDER YEARS. We gave him the task to do this as a kids' phenomenon, for the very young, but to write it in a way that would appeal to a much older audience; and that's what I think Todd brought to the screenplay. Todd gave it some of that same flavor as THE WONDER YEARS.

Photo Alan Markfield

April (Judith) is forever indebted to Raphael since he saved her life, twice!

The very first Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle was this one by Kevin (penciled in 1983, inked in '85).

So, we think the picture is going to be absolutely *adored* by the young kids, but the older kids will be the core of its audience. We think it's camp, we think it's timely, and it's really an adult movie along with a kid movie. Then we set a start date of July 7, 1989. We had gone to **Henson's** back in December and literally started talking to them from *scratch* about what was required, because the Turtles had to look *great* on screen, they couldn't look rubbery or animated. We wanted them to come up with some *incredible* technology, and we gave him almost a wartime objective; it was like, "We've got to bomb Germany in six months, you guys have to be ready." And they went to work on this marvelous techonlogical achievement.

There are *six* technological advances in animatronics, things that had never been done before, and they normally would only take on one new advancement for any picture. But we *needed* to have six so that these figures come alive and are totally and absolutely real. And they succeeded beyond our wildest dreams, and they were ready to go when

"HOWARD THE DUCK never entered into

we were ready to go. We decided to shoot it in North Carolina because they have facilities down there, we needed to have *enormous* sets built — plus we wanted a controlled environment because we're dealing with a lot of technological stuff you couldn't do on location. So, we set a schedule for 45 days in North Carolina and five days in New York, and we wrapped the picture Friday the 8th of September. The shooting went very well. We had technological problems, but we were able to overcome them.

DARREL: *Well, Hollywood's been dealing with technological problems for almost a century.*

TOM: Yeah. But we're a small independent company. I think, quite frankly, if a studio had done this picture it would have been $30 million. Our picture *looks* like $30 million, but when you're dealing with a studio type of environment you immediately put on major overhead. They want *major* stars, which we never did because we felt that that would undermine the Turtles as themselves. We *purposely* went out and sought very fine actors that would fit beautifully and not outshine the Turtles.

And that we found in **Judith Hoag**, a New York actress who is a real star rising — she just completed CADILLAC MAN with **Robin Williams**. She brought to the role a very much of a gritty New York kid, an April O'Neil exactly like we wanted. And **Elias Kotea** also brought a very much of an intense character to Casey Jones, very hip and very New York — and he is going to be a major star also. So, we had a *brilliant* director, a wonderful cinematographer in **John Fenner** — the *look* of the picture, the lighting, is just incredible — two very fine up and coming actors, a marvelous job on the part of **Jim Henson's** Creature Shop, and eventually a very fine soundtrack which we are now in the process of negotiating. We haven't firmed things up yet, but we should very soon.

We've got enormous enthusiasm from New Line Cinema. The reason we were attracted to New Line is that they're an independent compay like us. All throughout the formation of the *whole* phenomenon, it's gone from Kevin and Peter, two small starting-out type guys who had a dream, a vision, and put it together; to **Mark Freedman**, an independent licensing agent — they could have taken it to Mattel or Kenner — to Golden Harvest, an independent company which has made some major pictures like CANNONBALL RUN, CANNONBALL RUN II, and HIGH ROAD TO CHINA; to us taking it to New Line, **Robert Shayne's** company which really hit pay dirt with the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series. It all seemed like a perfect fit, a bunch of hungry young people all together outside the major studios; and I think it's all been *successful* because everybody's hungry. Sometimes a studio is great, but on the other hand in the studio you may get caught in an administration change or they may not like it. Whereas people like New Line, a proven entity as a film distributor, their *enthusiasm* is superb. Everybody has such great enthusiasm.

DARREL: *One thing, you said "camp" a little earlier, and a lot of people that read comic books kind of have a sour taste in their mouths from that word.*

TOM: Strike that.

DARREL: *Well, the impression it leaves is the old BATMAN TV show.*

TOM: Maybe you're right, maybe that's the wrong word. You know, to bring something out of the comics — and this is why both Kevin and Peter wanted to control not only the story but also the dialogue — maybe the word is not "camp," but it more parallels what the comic-book audience is *looking* for. The same kind of shtick they do in the comic book, we have in the movie. It's going to be closer to *their* vision than BATMAN was to the comic book, let's put it that way.

DARREL: *The music videos from Steve Barron that you saw, what was it in those videos that made you want him to direct this film?*

TOM: Well, I look at music videos much like movies — they are, really, little three-minute films that get the music across, the artists, and tell little stories. But his lighting and visual camera movements are so *incredibly* brilliant, and that's the kind of thing I wanted to see put into this movie. The Turtles really are an *environment*, with a very subterranean look, darkness, and then brightness when they go into the countryside. The feeling that goes into these videos through the music is what I was looking for to just really bring the Turtles off the screen to the audience.

And you're always dealing with "Are these things going to hold up for 90 minutes or are people going to get tired of these Turtles after the first *five* minutes?" If you're telling them just a direct story, I think people will become quite bored. That's why I felt that rather than going with an orthodox director who just goes out and directs a story, I

Crack news anchor April O'Neil (Judith Hoag) reports on the latest Gotham crime wave.

Photo: Alan Markfield

my mind until people started reminding me."

wanted to make each *scene* not only funny and interesting but *visually* stimulating. We keep building, keep moving, keep it interesting, with the quick cuts and the lighting and the camera angles. The movie will look like a movie but it's very stylized. Of course, nobody could sit through 90 minutes of music videos either! But it's got the artistry

DARREL: *When I first heard there was going to be a live-action TURTLES film, I just had horrendous visions of a repeat of HOWARD THE DUCK. How did it evolve that this was going to be a live-action film?*

TOM: Well, first of all, we didn't want to make animation because there's already the cartoon on Saturday mornings. The only thing left to do . . . I guess you could go to animation, but this is a classic case of a phenomenon in merchandising, comic books, games, whatever, that became a movie, rather than a movie that became everything else. It was really the last frontier, to make these things realistically come together.

People bring up HOWARD THE DUCK, I say, "Look, did you *see* HOWARD THE DUCK?" First of all, the comic did not have that tremendous ground swell of, you know, popularity that the TURTLES has now. And I don't think you really *liked* Howard the Duck. You're going to *love* the Turtles. That's one signal difference. The Turtles look *incredible*, they become *real*, and I don't think anybody bought Howard the Duck. When I first started telling people about this, everybody laughed at me — there'll be a lot of red faces in the board rooms because virtually everybody got a shot at it

I had a few people come back and say, "Why is this any different from HOWARD THE DUCK?" "Did you *see* HOWARD THE DUCK?" It's like people making a Western that doesn't work; there can still be good Westerns. HOWARD THE DUCK is just a bad movie, and you didn't like the character. But we've got four *wonderful* Turtles, a wonderful Splinter, an awesome, evil Shredder, a good story. Nobody wants to repeat a failure. You know, HOWARD THE DUCK never entered into my mind until people started reminding me about it. And, you know, HOWARD THE DUCK may have made money if it cost what TURTLES cost.

DARREL: *Well, the thing about the HOWARD film, which I did see, was . . . I know the comic books, and they had everything in the film* except *for the real Howard. The way it always worked, I thought, was that everything was real outlandish but there was something in Howard that recognized how weird everything was, so you could respond through Howard to all of the weirdness. They didn't have that central core in the Howard in the film. But it sounds like you've kind of recognized that need in your concentration on the Turtles.*

Photo Alan Markfield

Splinter: Ninja master and beloved teacher of the Turtles.

TOM: Yeah. I'll be honest with you, it never even entered my mind to think about HOWARD THE DUCK. We wanted to take Peter and Kevin's ideas and put them into a live-action movie, because they're really *interesting* characters. And it has somewhat of a moral These guys are against evil, and they bring about a change when they get caught up with this gang with this sort of an Oliver/Fagin thing going on. And I think parents seeing this are going to say, "This is really *good.*" This is great filmmaking that gets all of the action and violence, but doesn't scoop it upon scoop upon scoop.

We have wondeful fights, very tough fights. We didn't want to have any gratuitous violence, we didn't want to have any dirty language — and yet I think we will be a "PG-13" or a "PG." We never wanted an "R," and we didn't want a "G" because we really wrote this for an older audience. I just can't wait for older audiences to take a look. I'm willing to bet that the fans of the comic books are going to be quite happy with what we've done. We've stayed right in sync.

We didn't want to go too wild on the first one that we did because we had to tell a back story — tell how the Turtles were formed — and if we're lucky enough to be successful then we'll make a series, sequels. That's very much on our minds. But cinematically, everybody that's seen the dailies are so *thrilled* with it they get goose bumps. We're just hoping the public will agree

DARREL: *Is this an original story? I mean, obviously the origin sequence is taken from the comics.*

TOM: We stay pretty much to the comics. There's only one new character, Tatsu, who is Shredder's enforcer, somewhat, played by a guy named **Toshishiro Obata** who was in BLACK RAIN. A wonderful tough character. We wanted to showcase Casey Jones and April O'Neil. And the April O'Neil in this does not have the yellow pantsuit, she's much more a hip and contemporary New York lady. And there's somewhat of a budding relationship between Casey and April But the real sell here is that you're going to love all of the Turtles.

"The Turtles really [illegible]n environment."

It's cute, it's fussy — it's a stuffed Turtle (Raphael).

DARREL: *I want to get into these new technologies a little bit. What kind of new technologies were developed for the film?*

TOM: Well, the only thing I'm at *liberty* to tell you — and that's not a cop-out because we made the agreement up front with **Jim Henson** we don't want to reveal these new technologies. In fact, we didn't do one of these "behind the scenes" movies, because **Jim Henson** is very concerned about giving away too much. Suffice it to say that there is new technology and that's been done with computers and servomotors and radio control things. That's effectively where we've left it. We didn't want anybody coming down and taking photos of these things, of the *preparation* of these things. We want to just sell the Turtles as the Turtles. It isn't important to look behind the scenes at how they built the models and stuff, and we just made a conscious decision up front to not even get into that. We didn't want to give that away.

DARREL: *One thing I had heard was that you were going with robots more than you were going with Muppet-type things.*

TOM: Robots? Well, they're neither Muppets nor robots. Let's put it this way, there's a little bit of a touch of *everything* in there. They're not robots. This is the most difficult question to answer, how the hell do these things *look*. We think you should just look at them as Turtles. Maybe that's a cop-out, but why go into the technical thing. We just said, "Hey, let's get on and make the movie." We will, if we're successful, eventually come out and do one of these "behind the scenes" movies

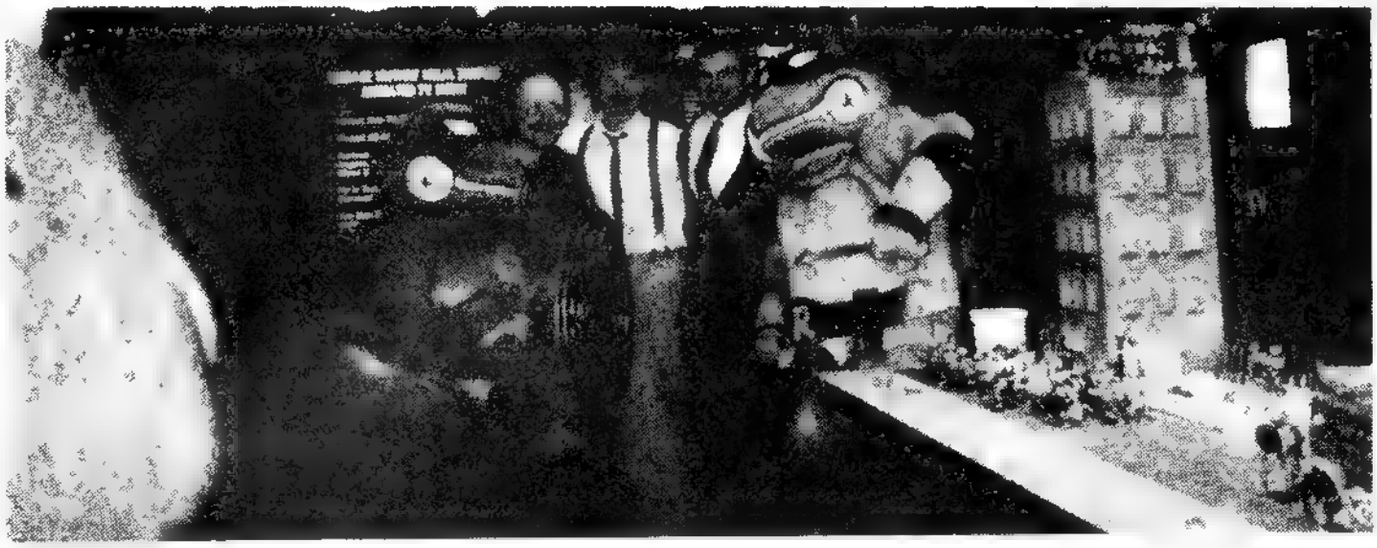
DARREL: *Okay. I think that's about it unless you'd like to add anything else?*

TOM: No, other than that I hope that your readership will let us know whether or not we've done our job. We made it as a motion picture, but we also realized that the comic's fans are very, very important. If they come out of the theaters and say it's a load of crap, that's going to hurt us.

We're convinced they're going to come out cheering

"I have absolute complete control, I put every deal together."

MARK FREEDMAN



Left to right: Michaelangelo, Peter Laird, Kevin Eastman, Mark Freedman (licensing agent for Eastman, Laird, and the Turtles), and Raphael. This photo was taken in Playmate Toys' showroom at the Toy Fair in New York City, February 1988.

They're everywhere these days, it seems, those four Turtles named Leonardo, Raphael, Michaelangelo and Donatello, who emerged from the minds of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird back in 1984. From an experimental one-shot spoof which succeeded beyond their wildest dreams, Kevin and Peter have seen their characters become toys, video games, a breakfast cereal, an animated series and, yes, soon to be a major motion picture. And in no way should be diminished the fact that these spectacular accomplishments are the results of Eastman and Laird's genius.

But there is another hero to this story, one who works behind the scenes taking care of business, allowing Kevin and Peter the luxury of devoting themselves primarily to their creativity. He is,

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark Freedman
Born: 1954 New York, NY
Occupation: Licensing and Merchandising Executive
Training: I started in the business in 1979 working for a company called Leisure Concepts, a licensing company. The first property that I participated in the licensing program on was BUCK ROGERS, and then I worked on a variety of properties for that company, one being the U.S. Ad Council campaign with McGruff the Crime Dog. I generally got my feet wet at Leisure Concepts and then went on to work for a company called Taft Broadcasting, which is the owner of the Hanna Barbera and Ruby-Spears animation characters. I handled licensing for THE FLINTSTONES, SCOOBY DOO, THE JETSONS, QUICKDRAW McGRAW, all of the classic Hanna-Barbera family of characters, until I decided to strike out on my own.
Most Unusual Product Has Been Involved With: I would say that NINJA TURTLES is unusual for all of us. It's a real Horatio Alger type story — I won't say we were absolutely starving, but none of us were on Easy Street. But getting together, basically art and business getting together — I'm obviously the business side — believing in a concept and developing a comic book into a national phenomenon . . . is it unusual? Yes — because of the odds that we had to beat. And now we get very unusual requests for NINJA TURTLES all day long, they don't stop. It's all over the world — NINJA TURTLES is international, by the way.

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1990 Mirage Studios, unless otherwise noted.

"I was not a comic-book fan, but I

essentially, a middleman, though you shouldn't let that term put you off. There is a certain brand of creative genius which he employs, and it is well worth noting. So, let's meet Mark Freedman of Surge Licensing . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you first become involved with TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*

MARK FREEDMAN: Well, in 1985 I struck out . . . I'll say semi on my own, with another gentleman, **Lee Friedman,** and we re-launched ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS, built that licensing program up. It was actually quite a substantial program. After that, I really wanted to strike out on my own, set up my own company, and I literally got that phantom phone call one day from a company called Palladium Books, a role-playing game company. I asked them a simple question: "What else do you have?" He said, "TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES." I said, "Wow, what's that?" They had licensed directly with Mirage to do the role-playing game.

At first I thought it was a joke, I thought he was pulling my leg. "TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, that's got to be a joke, it *can't* be real." I got off the phone politely, and I thought about the name, and I called him right back to find out more. He told me about the comics, **Eastman** and **Laird,** and that was when I first saw the characters. I thought about it for awhile, then I went to try to find **Eastman** and **Laird.** Several months went by, and then finally **Eastman** and **Laird** gave me a ring, the guy at Palladium had told them about me, and that's how it all began in 1986.

DARREL: *What sort of involvement had you had with comics before?*

MARK: I was not a comic-book fan, expert, or aficionado, but I had a pretty good feel for products - and when I say "products" I mean "properties," new ideas. I had been working very closely with the toy business for a number of these licenses, and when I first saw the concept, saw the book, what I saw was a blueprint for a toy line. Their comic had all of the basic elements that would go into developing a toy line — namely, the action figures market.

But it wasn't just that their comic books had these components of a toy line, the whole *concept* was what really caught my eye. I felt that this was *so* radically different, it had never been done before, that if I could get the toy company to take this risk in developing a toy line -- it's really 180 degrees different from all of the other toy lines — then I thought we had a better-than-even shot of breaking through the clutter of HE-MAN and THUNDERCATS type products. I felt the name and the concept in particular the *name* - - would grab so much attention, both from the media and from kids everywhere, that it would sell this property.

DARREL: *I really have very little idea of what you do as a licensor. Obviously, the first thing would be to secure your rights to represent the property?*

MARK: That's correct. First, of course, I met **Eastman** and **Laird.** They explained the concept to me and went through the comics — and I just exploded! I just *knew* that this would be great! I had that feeling in the middle of your stomach that tells you, "All right, calm down, calm down. You know this is good, don't blow it. Sign the property and then go out and do what you do best."

And **Eastman, Laird** and myself, we got along. I think they trusted me, and I trusted them — because I believed our relationship had to go *beyond* the written word on a piece of paper, *beyond* what was written into the contract, that we

Photo Alan Markfield

had a pretty good feel for products."

could get along and work together, build it together. I think they could sense the kind of person I was, and I could sense the kind of people they were, and we were very much on the same wavelength. It was not high pressure "sign this contract or else" but rather "let's go out and make this thing happen together." I think they appreciated that, and we shook hands on the deal.

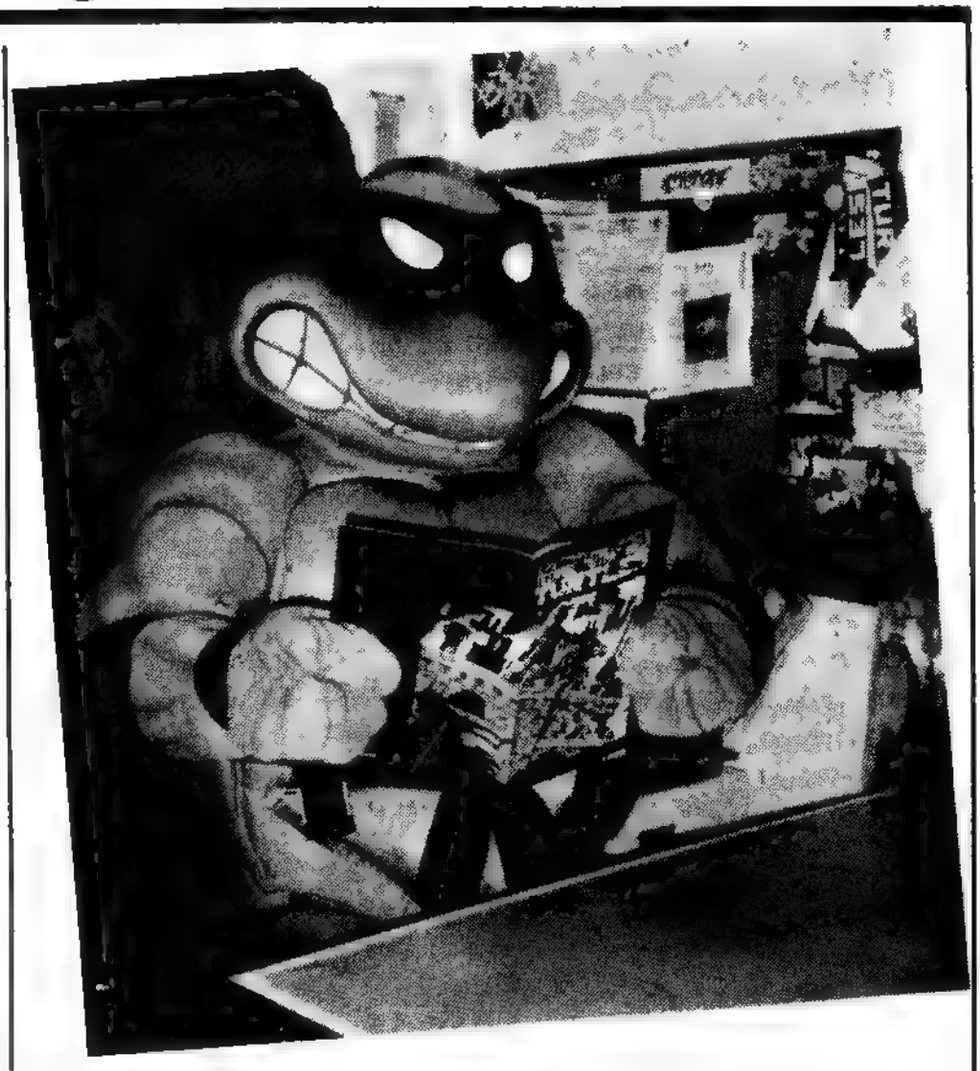
I made them an offer they couldn't refuse. I said if they weren't happy with me then they could fire me on the spot, one day's notice. That certainly gave them a comfort level in having me represent them. I might add that I no longer have that agreement with them. *(Laughter.)* Because the business, obviously, is too big, so I have to protect myself. But that hasn't changed our relationship one bit. I still feel we're very tight, close. If something has to be discussed, I'll jump up, go over there. And we really have not had any problems whatsoever; I can't think of one issue that we ever had a disagreement on.

DARREL: *What sort of thing would you look for in a property in order to want to represent it?*

MARK: Well, a lot of people out there — this is actually a very good question — a lot of people out there look for trends in the marketplace, particularly in the toy business. They say, "Oh, gee, I think *space* will be a good thing for the next few years." I don't believe in that anymore. I used to, but I don't anymore. I've learned that you have to *create* the trend, not follow it. That's really the key to a major success. It's the first one out that *makes*, let's say, space happen, or the Old West happen, or — like TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES — a ninja spoof concept happen.

So, rather than look for a theme or a trend, I look for just a great concept. If a concept is great then it doesn't matter what the so-called trend is, because a trend is just how the so-called conventional wisdom people are stereotyping what's happening out there for the moment. No one can predict what's going to happen next year or the year after. So I look for things that are just generally good.

And TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES was, in my opinion, a brilliant concept. I just exploded, I don't think I can express how *excited* I was when I saw the concept! The name, the characters, *everything* about it was just so different. And it was so well written! It was just absolutely great! That was what my gut told me. No one was there telling



me that it was great, I just felt it and followed my hunch.

DARREL: *And then after you secured your rights to represent Eastman and Laird, suddenly there were thousands of Turtles all over the place.*

MARK: Well, not so sudden. Quite frankly, it was a very long haul, it was over two years. We met in '86, the first TURTLES toy didn't hit the market until June of '88. So we're talking about almost two years of hard work, of jumping up and down, of yelling and screaming and begging, of trying to convince people that this thing was great I never lost sight of it for a minute, never thought for one moment that it wasn't going to happen, because I felt that this thing was so good that it was going to happen.

I think I just basically *willed* it to happen. I just didn't rest until it was sold to the toy company to develop. If you were to ask anyone involved with the entire project, I think they would agree that there was no one more hyper than me trying to push this thing along. I did calm down a little bit — not all the way, mind you — but my energy went right into the concept.

DARREL: *How much help was it to you in trying to develop this toy line, or get this toy line developed, that the comic book was the popular success in comic-book circles that it was?*

MARK: I think the comic was *very* important. There is no question that this property was launched off of the comic book — not off the TV series, not off anything else, off the original **Eastman** and **Laird** comic. The entire concept, the character development, the story, it all comes out of the comic. What helped me to sell Playmate Toys on the concept was the fact that the comic was very successful and being operated, basically, by two guys on a shoestring operation.

They were meeting with so much success, that's what was so encouraging. They had this *major* success in the comic-book industry with their original black-and-white comics, with very little advertising. Kids were going for the book in a big way. And that's what really tipped me off! So I would say that it was probably the most instrumental element that went into my ability to package it, that the comic book was so successful. They were shipping an *enormous* quantity of books for a small publisher!

You're a FOOL, Jumballah!! You know it won't take me long to find an antidote!
Jumballah think of this! Try to prepare antidote without Fingers!
CURSES!
You're still a fool, Jumballah! I can always get someone else to help me!!
Jumballah think of that, too!
whoops!
Well, you still have to catch me, Jumballah! I'm no sitting duck!!
AAAARGH!!
CHOP
Always you make bad jokes rotten puns! Soon, you will not make jokes! You will only make loud, piercing screams!!
Says you!! outta my way, NUMSKULL!
BORNEO
MAYA
CARACA
Hey!!

an actual scene! →

We asked Marcel Chevalier, the famous pantomime artist, to give his interpretation of the EYE OF MONGOMBO (translations provided by Mimes of America)

"thrilling, edge-of-your-seat excitement! Suspence and drama in the Hitchcock tradition!"

"Hilarious comedy... Sophisticated ... would not be out of place on a shelf next to Oscar Wilde."

"terrific characters... continues the literary tradition of Ishmael, Huck Finn, and ... OW!"

"I think I'm stuck... I can't breathe... help! .. For God's sake, someone please help me!"

Doug Sez

In this adventure/comedy series, anthropology professor and globe-trotting adventurer Cliff Carlson is fired due to his villainous arch-rival Professor Nuskle, and then turned into a duck by an evil witch-doctor. He and his faithful assistants take off on a journey to find the Eye of Mongombo, when they run into two old enemies: Gruber and Kawliga!

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

EYE OF MONGOMBO #1. 28 pages, black-and-white comic book. $2.00 ($2.50 in Canada)

"When I saw the book, I saw a blueprint for a toy line."

I noticed that they were shipping over 150,000 of a book, of an issue, at $1.50 cover price, while Marvel was shipping 300,000 of a good issue at half that cover price. So I asked, "Which is better?" I quickly learned a little bit about the comic-book business. And — to answer the question — I would say the comic book was probably 75% of what helped to sell it. There was one other thing that they had.

DARREL: *Which was?*

MARK: Someone had made them a giant rubber replica of one of the Turtles, and it had the most hysterical grin on its face! *(Laughter.)* So I had a three-dimensional representation of what these characters look like that someone could hold and touch and see. I think that helped tremendously, that someone could actually see it *off* the printed page in a three-dimensional representation. So, with the comics and this rubber puppet someone had made them, I set out to market the property.

And one other thing did happen, by the way. The day I was going out to sell this to Playmates the NEW YORK DAILY NEWS had a half-page picture of a boy holding up a NINJA TURTLES comic, and the caption underneath the picture was: "TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, just one of the many comics wowing kids today at" some comic-book convention. So I had this big picture from THE DAILY NEWS, I think that also helped as well. It was just something that I picked up — and this also led me to believe that just the name would get a lot of media attention.

DARREL: *And eventually you did sell Playmate Toys on the property?*

MARK: Yes. A lot of people ask me why I went to Playmates. There are a lot of rumors that I shopped it around the industry; but no, I only showed it to one company, Playmate Toys. The reason I only showed it to one company is that I know a lot about the toy industry, and I had my reasons for going to Playmates.

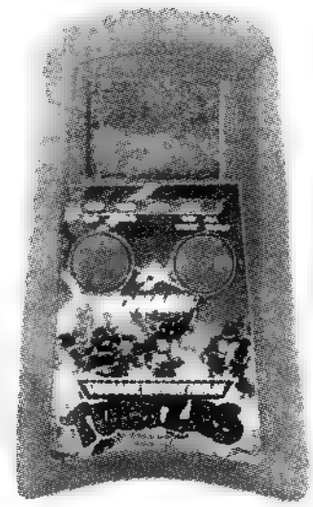
First of all, I had a relationship with the marketing department there, one man in particular who headed up their marketing department — **Richard Sallis**, vice president of marketing for Playmates. They were a growing, strong, cash-rich toy company that had just come off the success of promoting a doll named Cricket, which did over $100 million for the company. And they wanted an entry into the action figure market.

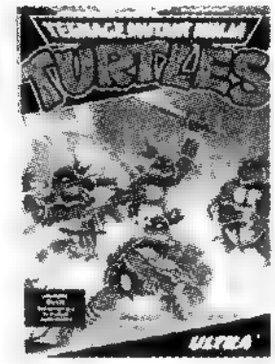
I felt that a smaller company would need something radically different to break through the clutter and compete well against the Hasbros and Mattels of the world. To this day, I truly don't believe that Hasbro or Mattel would have even touched this property, for many many reasons. Nor would Matchbox, although I would never have even approached Matchbox with something like this, because they had a tremendous failure with another action figure line.

And action figures as a category in the toy business was falling out of favor with the buyers. So, I had to find a company that *wanted* to get into the business, and that realized that the category of action figures wasn't down, just that certain action figures were down — HE-MAN and THUNDERCATS and SILVER-HAWKS — and also realized that the concept of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES could indeed do well *despite* the so-called trend away from action figures, of action figures falling out of favor. And I was right. So they were the only company that I approached.

DARREL: *And, of course, the toy line has been a tremendous success. To the extent that sometimes people will try to rip off TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.*

MARK: Yes. One of the things that we do is make sure that we have the necessary trademark protection, we have spent an *enormous* amount of money on filing trademarks and protecting our interests in the property. We just recently had to sue a very large retail chain for importing unauthorized TURTLES merchandise, in fact we're about to send





out a press release on it. We're about to win the case, they've already conceded and Customs has impounded thousands and thousands of bogus plush figures — the U.S. Customs Service is working, I can say that.

There is a proliferation of unauthorized products. The big problem is not

"This property was launched off the comic

that we're necessarily losing royalty income, but our concern is — for example, on the pirated toys — what if they're dangerous, say it's painted with lead paint and an arm or a leg falls off and a child swallows it and dies. We're in trouble because they're not going to ask, "Is that one of the *real* Turtles, or is it a knockoff?" We have tremendous quality control provisions on all of our licensed products, because obviously there's a certain amount of public accountability That's our biggest concern and why we want to get these goods out of the marketplace and stop these pirates, because we're concerned that people might get hurt. It's a problem, so we come down on these people very very quickly. That's the . . .

DARREL: *The downside of licensing.*

MARK: With our success — how do I want to put it . . . with all of the success that we're having, having risen to this level of success, people will knock you off, take a shot at you, try to sell this bogus merchandise. That's sort of the bad that comes along with the good. In a way it's a compliment, 'cause no one ever knocked off a failure. So, we all expected it, and we have this problem, and in a way I'm happy to report it — but it's a total pain in the rear end. To deal with it takes a lot of time, and there's really no money in it for us. It takes a lot of work and the legal costs are very high, and that kind of thing — and we don't enjoy doing it. I'd rather worry about getting out next year's program, creating new promotions, that kind of thing.

DARREL: *Now, I understand that your representation rights for TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES goes beyond the toys.*

MARK: Yes. I represent **Eastman** and **Laird** for the property, for all licensing, merchandising, entertainment, promotion — basically for all merchandising from toys and T-shirts to television and film.

DARREL: *So, you would have had some involvement with the video games and everything else?*

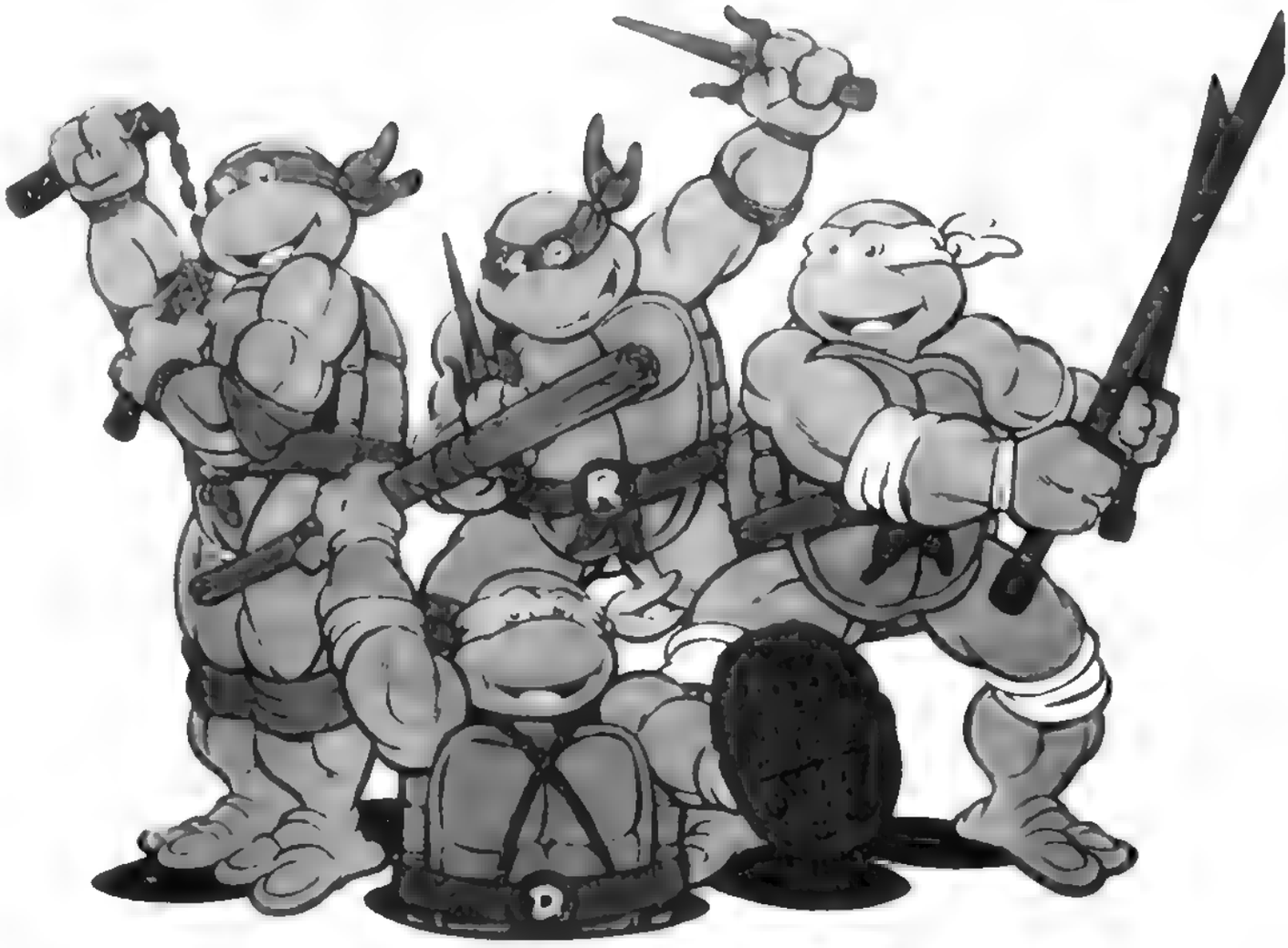
MARK: I have absolute complete control, I put every deal together — of course, with the confirmation and approval of **Eastman** and **Laird.**

DARREL: *What was your involvement in putting together the deal with the movie?*

MARK: We had been approached by many people to option our rights to develop TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES for a movie. I had this idea that I wanted to do a live-action film using the Turtles as costumed characters, rather than an animated film. The reason for that is that the animated films, with the exception of the classics, don't really seem to do well. Why would someone shell out five bucks for an animated NINJA TURTLES movie when they can watch it on television? I felt we had to do something special, something that would make people want to go out and see a whole new representation of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

One company came out of the fray, Golden Harvest. Initially we discussed doing a live-action film, and they agreed wholeheartedly that this should *not* be an

book—not the TV series, not anything else."



animated film, it should be live action. What happened was over a period of development they realized that NINJA TURTLES was quickly becoming a phenomenon in this country, and budgets went up, they put more of a financial commitment into the project. Before we knew it we ended up with a very sizeable budget and a great director and cast, and they went out and hired **Jim Henson's** company to do the actual Turtle costumes. They're half costumes, half animatronics — the heads are animatronic — and they really didn't spare on anything.

And they filmed it in the United States, which I felt was important because it's an American story — and I'm happy to report that the film is done and is now in postproduction being polished, and will be released March 30th. But to answer your question, I sat down with Golden Harvest and actually negotiated the contract, made sure that it had everything that we wanted, especially creative control for **Eastman** and **Laird**. They had the right to approve the script and so on and so forth. Golden Harvest was also very careful in that *they* wanted **Eastman** and **Laird** closely associated with the film. They really spent a lot of time making sure they stuck close to what **Eastman** and **Laird** had already developed in TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

DARREL: *Well, that is . . . it may not be a unique situation, but it's certainly unusual.*

MARK: What do you mean?

DARREL: *In movies they usually don't have to pay attention to the original owners after they secure their rights to make the film.*

MARK: Yeah, you're absolutely right. Normally they buy the rights and then they just do whatever the hell they want. I really don't know, for example, if the BATMAN movie was close to **Bob Kane's** original idea of what Batman should be — but I'm sure **Bob Kane** is now saying it was! *(Laughter.)* Because it was a tremendous success.

But I think Golden Harvest was really sensitive to . . . well, I *know* they were really sensitive to it — because **Bobby Herbeck**, the screenwriter, literally camped out in Northampton for 30 days, and **Steve Barron**, the director, went up to visit them. They really did their homework! They studied the comics, they asked many questions of **Eastman** and **Laird**, they spent a lot of time in Northampton — so they could understand everything. So, from that perspective it was probably very unusual, but also very smart.

They don't want to upset the grass roots fans. The people that have supported TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES from the very start are very important, so it's very important to keep that base happy. And they were also sensitive to the younger fans who come to TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES by the cartoons and the Archie comics. So it's really a blend, but it's closer to the original comics. I think that's important.

We want to offer something to all the people. For the kids that really don't know the original comics, the real NINJA TURTLES — not that the cartoon is different, it's just targeted towards that younger audience — they will find the movie true to what *they* know. There's something there for everyone.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

FLARE UP

Dear Dave,

With FLARE finally about to come back, this is something that needs to be said in no uncertain terms:

The self-righteous hypocrisy of that small portion of the comic book audience that has inaccurately labeled FLARE as sexist continues to astonish me. To a greater or lesser extent, the **Buddy Saunderses** and **Jim Hanleys** (and even the **Don Thompsons** and the **Kim Thompsons**) of the comic book world read into FLARE something that simply isn't there. In so doing, they reveal far more about themselves than they do about the comic book.

Buddy and Jim (and Don and Kim), you're wrong. You're so far wrong it would almost be laughable if it weren't so personally insulting. In truth, FLARE exists in deliberate and direct *opposition* to the pernicious and pervasive sexism of the mainstream superhero comic book. Consider that when we speak of the mainstream superhero comic book, we're talking about a medium in which one of the most popular forms of entertainment is the physical or psychological rape of a strong female character. In comics, whether she happens to be Tigra, or the Scarlet Witch, or the Black Canary, the strong woman inevitably becomes the hapless victim.

But Flare is not a victim. In Flare, for perhaps the first time in the history of the comic book, we see a strong, undeniably female archetype taking a starring role in a mainstream superhero title. Flare is not a male archetype wearing a bra; neither is she a sniveling wimp, nor is she an archbitch who has no use for men. She's a strong, beautiful woman who's conscious of both her beauty and her strengths, who thoroughly enjoys using them to make it on her own terms in a man's world.

In truth, FLARE is a woman's comic book

To those men who see FLARE only as cheesecake, it may seem odd to hear it said that FLARE is a woman's comic book. But the statement is true. We consistently get a stronger positive reaction to the character from women than we do from men, and I have to believe it happens because women tend not to be blinded by the unconscious forms of sexism peculiar to a large minority of men in contemporary American society.

A telling point, perhaps, is the bizarre interpretation some of the same people who see FLARE as being sexist have placed on the loving relationship she shares with her best friend. The first time I was asked if Flare had a lesbian thing for Lady Arcane, my jaw dropped, and for a long moment the only sound I could articulate was a flabbergasted "Whaa?" It was beyond me how anyone could have interpreted Flare's affection for Donnah as being in any way a sexual thing. But then the question was asked again. And again. And it was always asked by men, never by women. And it finally came to me that these were people who not only didn't understand women, these were people who didn't understand their reactions to what they thought they were seeing.

Gentlemen, get it right. Those of you who perceive a celebration of femininity as somehow being exploitative of a woman's sexuality are the ones who in truth are sexist. You are sexist in precisely the sense you mean to use the word. In your minds, a woman cannot show affection without a strong implication of sex; in your minds, a woman's beauty cannot be displayed without implying a desire for sex. You are the ones who perceive the woman as nothing more than a sexual thing. You are the ones with the problem.

Those of you who believe that the first few issues of FLARE sold so phenomenally well only because it included cheesecake miss the point. There have been many comic books with cheesecake, but none of them have ever sold as well as FLARE. Indeed, in the entire history of the direct market, cheesecake or not, no comic book title until FLARE had ever shown continuing geometric increases in advance orders of 10% to 25% per issue. By issue #7, had we been able to continue publishing, even at the level of orders we were getting, FLARE would have been among the top twenty comic book titles in terms of retail dollars, Marvel and DC included. Further, had we somehow been able to achieve full penetration into retail stores that still weren't carrying the title, or that weren't carrying as many copies as they should have been carrying, our best estimate is that we could have been achieving direct-market sales in excess of 50,000 copies. This at a price tag of $2.95 a shot.

In no uncertain terms, FLARE put to the lie the conventional industry wisdom that female characters cannot carry their own titles. What FLARE demonstrated was the more subtle truth that the industry as a whole had never been able to figure out *how* to feature a strong, independent woman in her own title.

Unfortunately, the sad truth is that industry still doesn't get it. In the aftermath of the success of FLARE, we did see a small explosion of titles featuring female characters. But those titles were no different, and no more successful than those that have gone before. It doesn't seem to have penetrated to the editorial level at Marvel and DC that what was happening with FLARE wasn't happening because of the cheesecake. It was happening because of who Flare is. It was happening because the character inspires joy in those of us who know her. It was happening because the character inspires love and devotion in those of us who work with her. It was happening because Flare is strong and beautiful in every sense of the words.

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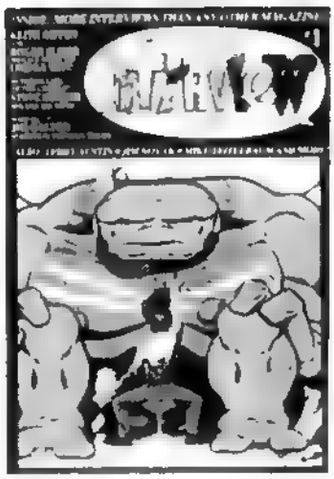

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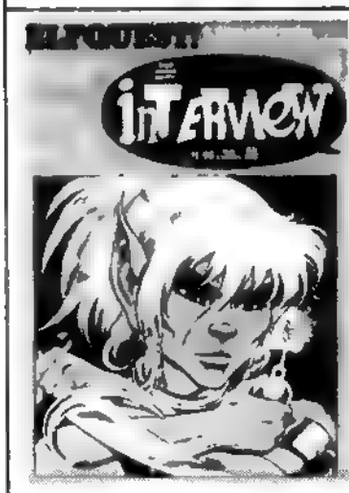

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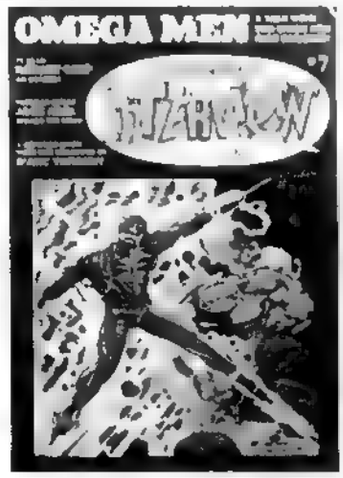

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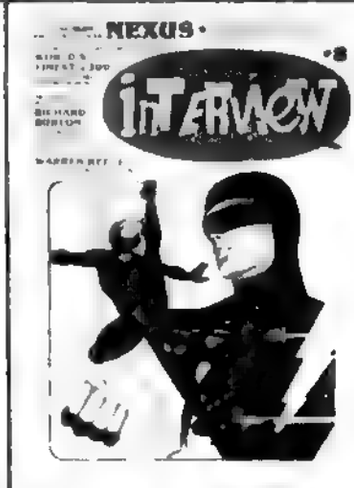

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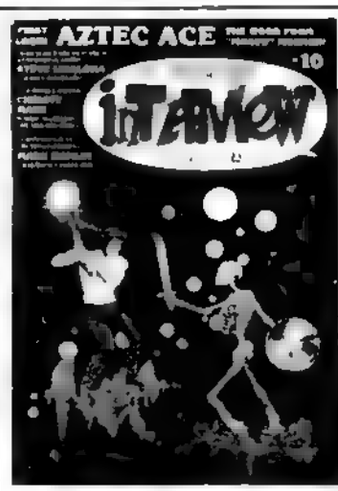

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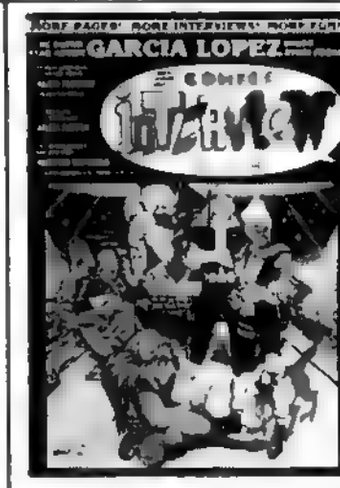

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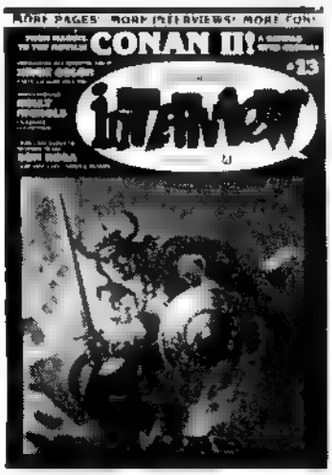

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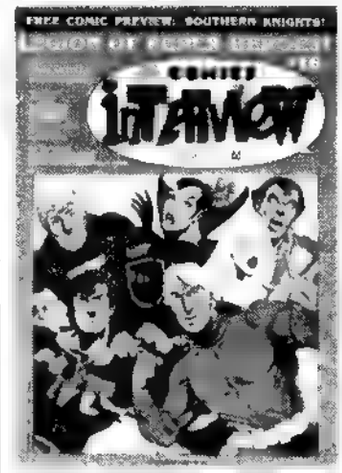

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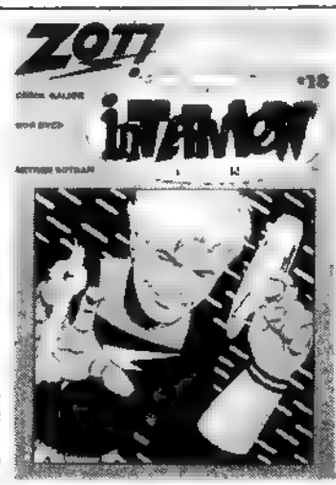

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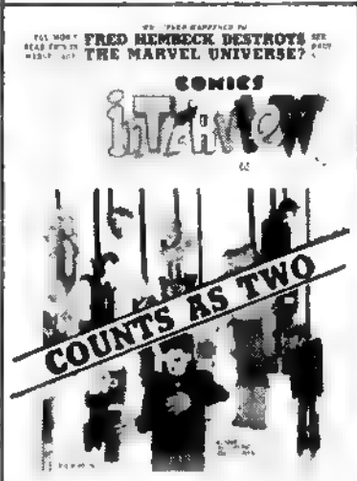

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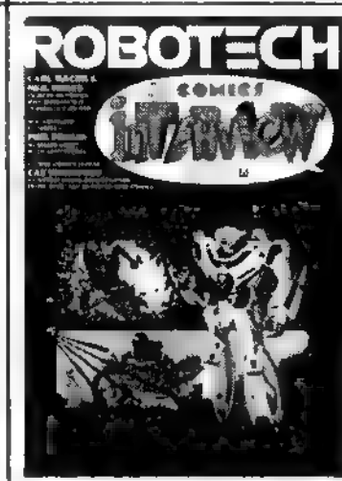

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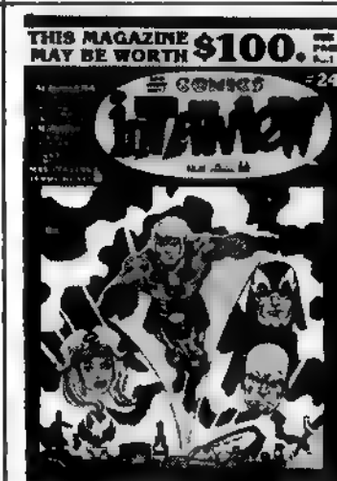

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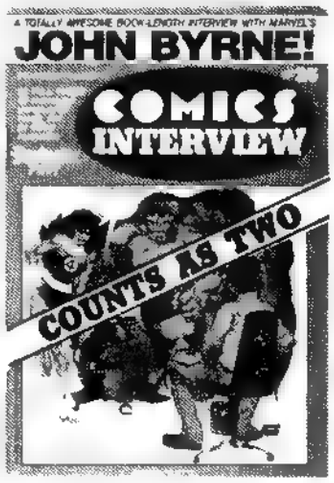

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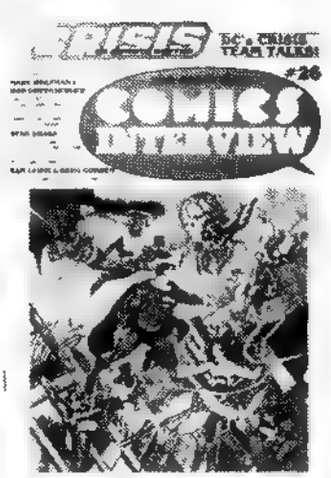

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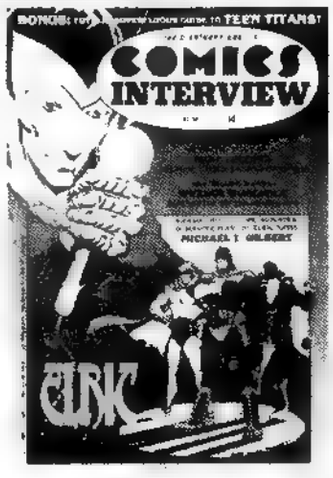

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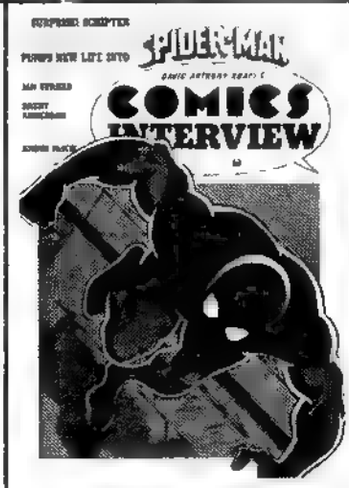

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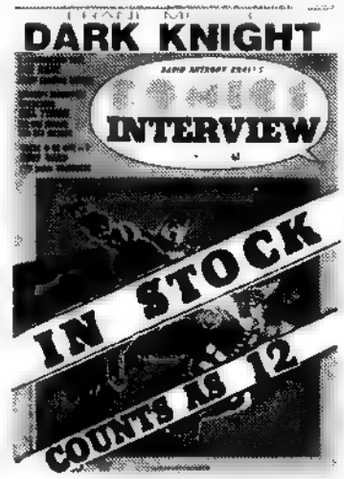

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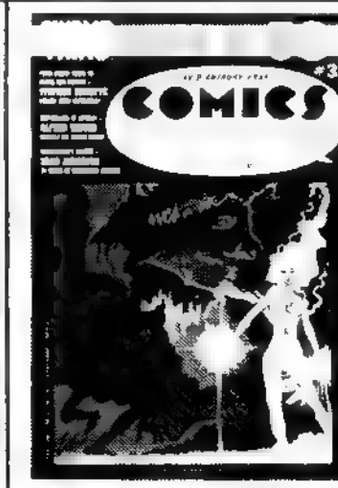

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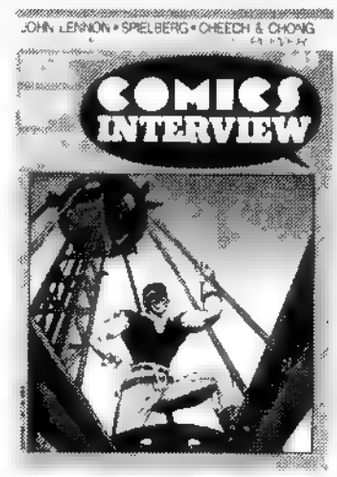

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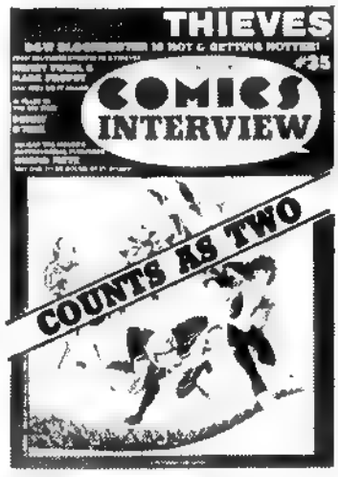

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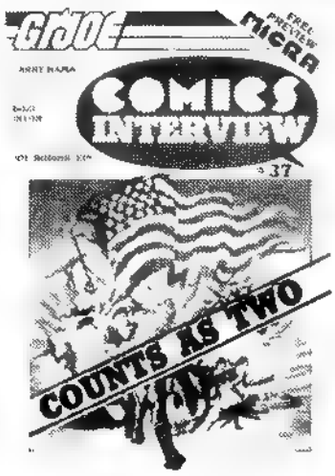

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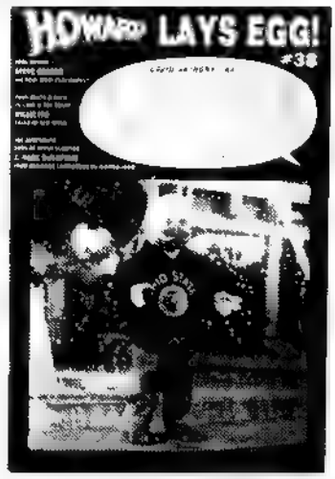

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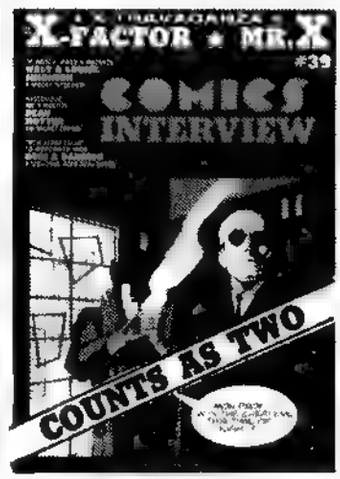

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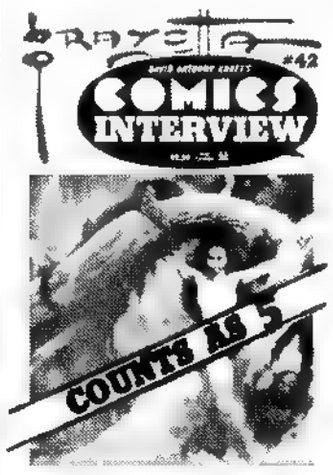

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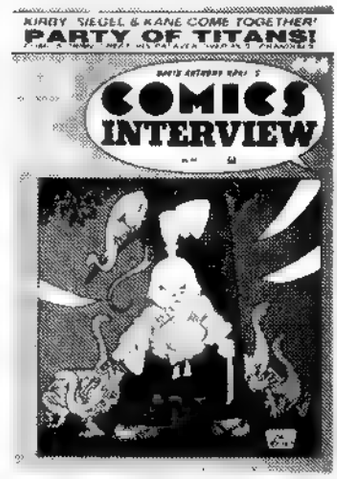

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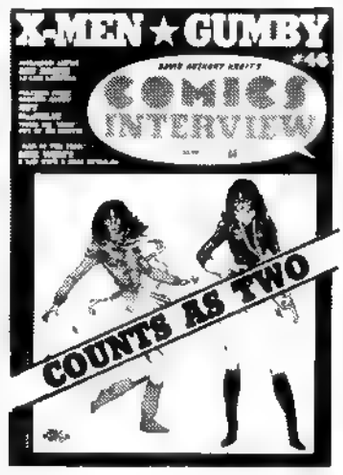

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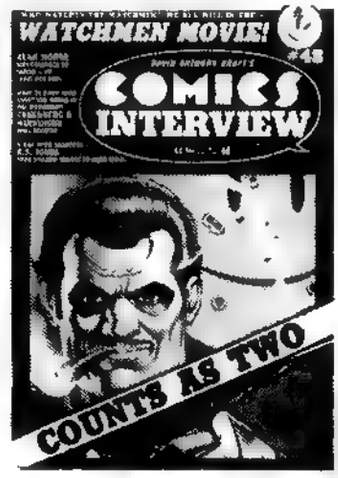

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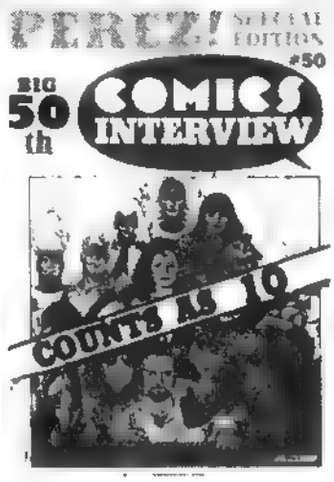

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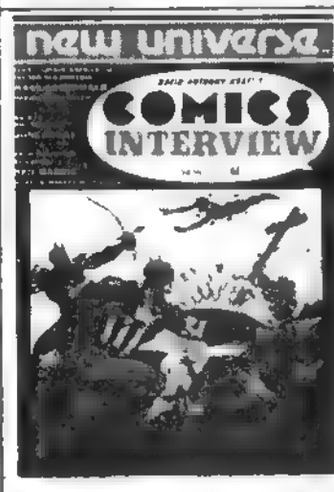

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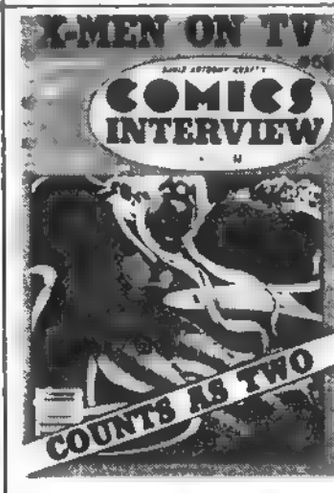

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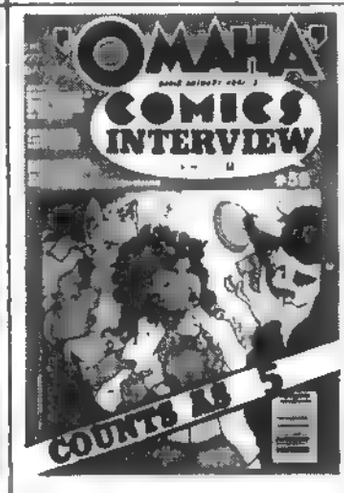

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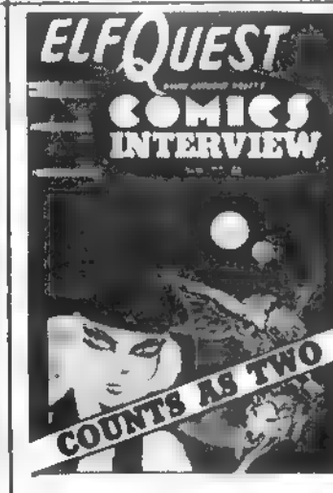

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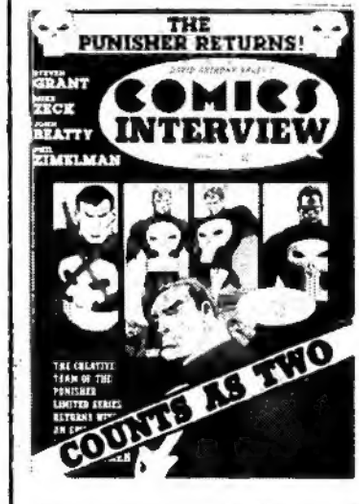

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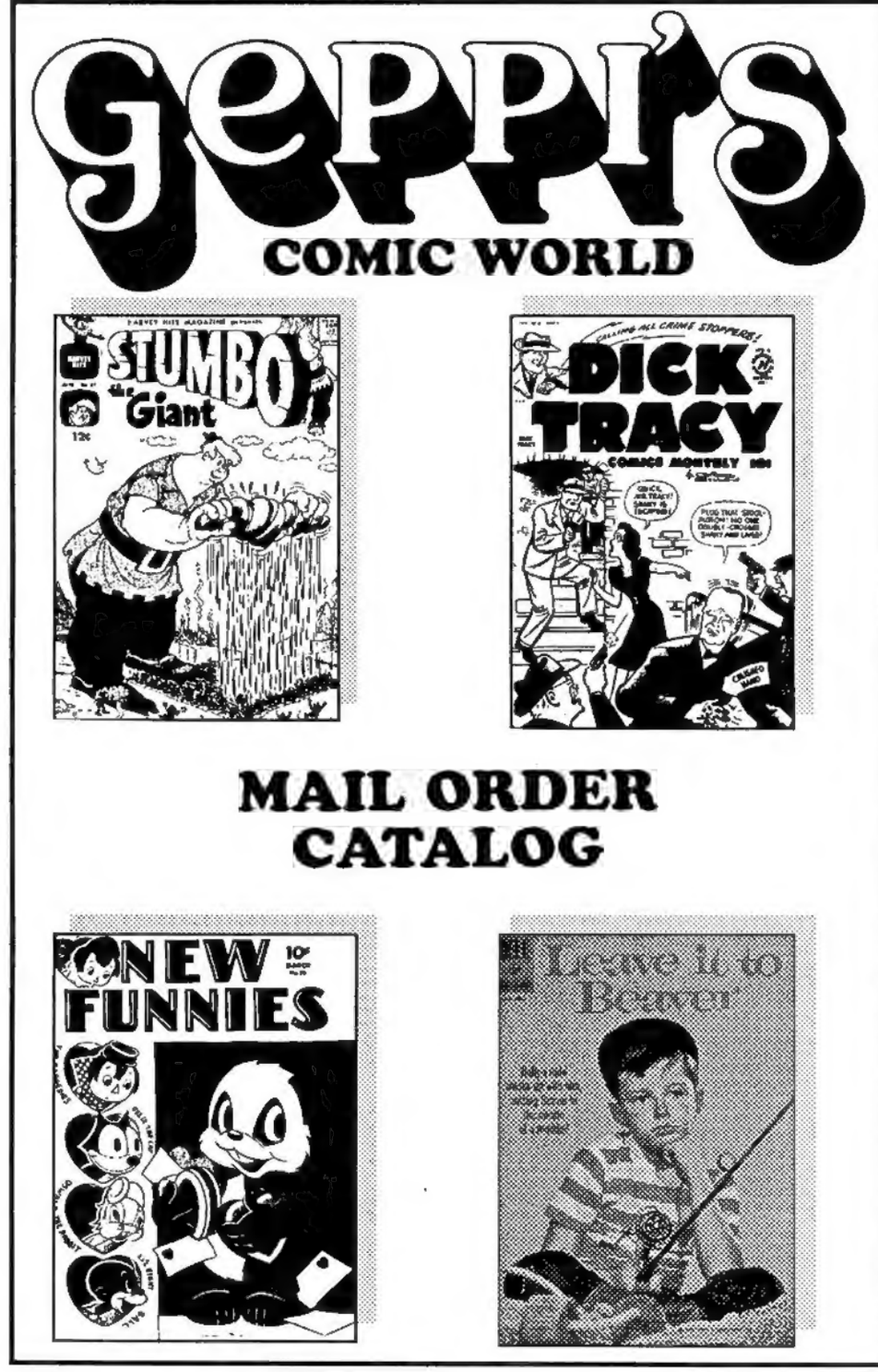

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